Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos more perfectly in the way of the Lord. (Acts 18:26)
This expanded issue of Priscilla Papers functions as part of this Jubilee celebration. In it you will find a compendium of evolving evangelical egalitarian thought stretching back to our beginning and beyond.

We have chosen to reprint six exemplary articles from years gone by. We begin as the first issue began, with an article by Kari Torjesen Malcolm. The subsequent five articles have been chosen from the several which have won accolades from the Evangelical Press Association. We are also including pieces by Gilbert Bilezikian and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis—scholars who have long been important to CBE International and to evangelical egalitarianism.

Their two items are included, not only because they function as high-quality examples of a vast body of egalitarian literature, but also because they have previously existed in places where many of our readers would not see them. First we offer excerpts from Groothuis’s booklet-length publication, The Feminist Bogeywoman (Baker, 1995). Next is material from a lengthy endnote in the third edition of Bilezikian’s highly-valued Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family (Baker, 1985, 1989, 2006). Our anniversary volume then ends with three book reviews. The first is a review of Tara Beth Leach’s Emboldened: A Vision for Empowering Women in Ministry (InterVarsity, 2017), written by Mandy Smith. The second, written by Dorothy Greco, reviews Alice Mathews’s Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church (Zondervan, 2017). Finally, Molly Kate Brannock reviews The Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-biblical Antiquity (Hendrickson, 2014-2017).

While looking through back issues and selecting items to reprint, I browsed my own 2011 article, “What Can We Say about Phoebe?” Doing so made me think of ways that I would try to improve that article if it were to be reprinted. For example, I could have investigated the designation “sister,” which Paul uses as he introduces Phoebe at the beginning of Romans 16: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe . . . .” I mention this because I suspect the several authors whose work is in this issue would also appreciate the chance to update their work. Nevertheless, we have decided to consider the articles in this issue to be true reprints as opposed to updated revisions. Had a different person selected articles for this anniversary issue, the results would surely be quite different—one of the pleasant challenges of having so many high-quality articles from which to choose. We trust that you will value this year-ending aspect of CBE International’s Year of Jubilee.

... greet you in the Lord.
When Will We Be “Real”? When Will We Be Free?
KARI TORJESEN MALCOLM, WINTER 1987

For years I’ve loved the story about the Velveteen Rabbit who was preoccupied with her identity—whether she was real or not! Sitting among the toys in a child’s room, she asks the skin horse about it, and gets the profound reply, “You are real when you are loved. When I was cuddled so much that I began to lose my skin, then I knew that I was real.”

As women, many of us have found out how wonderful it is to be loved by our families. We agree with the skin horse that we are real when we are loved. But then we venture out beyond the shelter of our home and loved ones, and go to the edge of the woods—into the male world—and we discover that we are not taken seriously.

“But she’s not real. She’s not like us,” the rabbits in the woods shout. In the world of the Velveteen Rabbit, the Fairy Godmother comes on the scene and makes everything right, so that she gets the same hind legs as all the other rabbits in the woods. But in our male-dominated evangelical world, how can we grow the “hind legs” that will give us status as real disciples of Jesus Christ, ready to lay down our lives for the Kingdom?

Instead of a Fairy Godmother to right the wrong, we have the Gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the saving power of God . . . because here is revealed God’s way of righting wrong . . . ” (Rom 1:16 NEB). Because we are created in God’s image, redeemed by Christ on the Cross, and empowered by the Holy Spirit with all the gifts given to the church, we are real disciples, in partnership with our brothers.

There is no limited atonement for women, even though one popular radio pastor preaches one Gospel for men and another for women. We will always bear the sin of Eve, according to his teaching. Paul was prepared for such heresy when he wrote: “I am astonished to find you turning so quickly away from him who called you by grace, and following a different gospel. . . . there are persons who unsettle your minds by trying to distort the gospel of Christ. But if anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast . . . the gospel you heard me preach is no human invention. . . . I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:6-8, 11-12 NEB).

While the dramatic issue in Galatia was circumcision, the great issue facing the church today is woman’s equal status and responsibility in home, church and society. To us being accepted as “real” should not lead to sexual promiscuity, nor to selfish ambition to find fulfillment in a career at the expense of family. When we are “real”—set free by Christ—we are set free to serve—to lay down our lives for family, friends, enemies and strangers.

As I am writing these lines, today’s mail brought a Christmas greeting from Sweden, from Rose-Marie Frebran. I shall never forget one of her challenges: “I am not free till every woman on earth is free.” That’s why we cannot just lay down our lives for our families and forget about the rest of the world. It is not a matter of either/or, but both! God can enlarge my heart and my capacity to care for my family and go beyond the four walls of my home to care for the world for which Christ died (John 3:16, Acts 1:8).

Being “real”—or set free—means looking beyond ourselves and our homes, first to the conservative women in our churches who are not “real”—not taken seriously. Our task is to provide friendship, forums for discussion on women’s status, information and Bible studies on women, written from a conservative perspective about the freedom Christ has given us in the Gospel. After penetrating evangelical churches with the liberating Good News, we have to go beyond the church and beyond our shores to women of other cultures who continue to live in some sort of patriarchal bondage that makes them less than “real” human beings. What about the 500 million Muslim women who have not been set free by the Gospel, and therefore are not taken seriously?

As a missionary and as a Biblical feminist, I have to agree with Rose-Marie: “I am not free till every woman on earth is free.”

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I begin this discourse with a disclaimer, since the title suggests far more than one can deliver in a limited amount of space. It suggests far more knowledge about this topic than I actually have—indeed, it is safe to say that there is much more that we don't know about these things than we actually do. What I hope to do is to offer a few probings into the cultural background of this passage—which has become such a crux for people on both sides of the issue of whether there is a divinely ordained hierarchy in the life of the church and home, based on gender alone.

1. Preliminary Matters

There are some preliminary matters that are important for our understanding of the passage itself.

1. Some assumptions about Ephesians itself and the role of this passage in this letter. Contrary to what is probably the majority opinion in current New Testament scholarship, I think the Ephesian letter is by Paul. Furthermore, I think the letter has to be kept in its historical context as a companion letter with Colossians and Philemon.

The letter was probably not written specifically to the church in Ephesus—some early manuscripts lack a name in 1:1; in 1:15 Paul speaks about only having heard about their faith, and there are no personal words whatsoever. It may have been either the letter to Laodicea that ended up in Ephesus, or—more likely, in my opinion—this was a circular letter to the many churches in the province of Asia that sprang out of what he had to say to the Colossians.

What is important for our purposes is the letter’s clear association with Colossians and, therefore, with Philemon. One of the unfortunate things that happened in the organizing of the Christian canon was the separation of Philemon from Colossians, for both letters would have been read together in Philemon’s house church, with both Philemon and Onesimus present. The point, of course, is that the so-called house rules that occur only in Colossians and Ephesians almost certainly spring from the circumstances that brought Onesimus back to Philemon's household and thus back to his house church.

All of this is to say that, in the Colossian expression of our text (3:18-4:1), you could substitute personal names for the generic terms there. Thus: “Apphia, submit to Philemon, as is fitting in the Lord. Philemon, love Apphia and do not be harsh with her. Onesimus, obey your earthly master, Philemon, in everything; and do it, not only when his eye is on you... Philemon, provide your slaves [including Onesimus] with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”

I press this point because these house rules grow directly out of the situation that caused Paul to write these letters in the first place: the return of Onesimus to Philemon, and the strange doctrines that are being spread among the Colossian Christians as reported to him by Epaphras.

2. Some observations. Before turning our attention to some words about culture, I want to make a few further observations that are important for understanding this passage in the larger context of Ephesians.

Note first that verse 18 is the swing verse in a passage that begins in 5:1-2—key not only for walking as children of light (vv. 2-17), but also especially for everything that follows. This is made certain by the fact that when Paul addresses husbands in verse 25, he deliberately echoes the language of verse 2:

“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (v. 2).
“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it” (v. 25).

Moreover, you have probably heard at some point that Ephesians is full of long sentences. Indeed it is, and here is an especially long one: the sentence that begins in verse 18 does not end until verse 23. Now all English translations try to help the reader out of the morass by breaking this into smaller sentences; however, in so doing the modern reader can miss a lot.

a. In Greek the sentence has a single subject and verb, which comes in the form of an imperative: “You [the readers] be filled with the Spirit”; this is then followed by a string of modifying participles:

• speaking to each other in psalms, hymns, and so on;
• singing and hymning the Lord (Christ) from the heart;
• thanking our God and Father always for all things through Jesus Christ;
• submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, followed by words to the wives with respect to their husbands.

b. The significance of this is twofold: First, the words to wives and husbands are to be understood as totally dependent on their being filled with the Spirit. That is, all the words in 5:22-6:9 presuppose a household of believers who are continually being filled with the Spirit of God.

Second, and especially important for us: In Paul’s mind there is the closest kind of link between Christian worship and the Christian household. This is almost certainly because the former (worship) took place primarily in the latter (the household). The point is that most of the earliest churches met in households, and the various households themselves, therefore, served as the primary nuclei of the body of Christ (or God’s household) in any given location.

3. A final, significant observation about the passage as a whole. Notice that three relationships are assumed:

• wives and husbands,
• children and parents,
• slaves and masters.

But notice also that in each case the second party in the relationship is usually the same person: husband = father = master. This...
would not always be the case, of course, since the assumption of the passage is very decidedly that of the Roman villa; that is, the household of the elite, or privileged.

- The model thus has little to do with villas where women served as heads of households, in which case the first relationship does not pertain at all, and the second probably less so (although widows may well have had children in the household).
- So also in the case of “married” slaves within the household (a true marriage, even though not recognized by Roman law); the “head” of the wife in this case was not her husband but the householder.
- Among the larger masses of people, moreover, very few of these relationships pertain at all or, as in the case of artisans like Priscilla and Aquila, there is a very clear sense of partnership in the marriage as in the business itself.

Here are two final observations about the passage in general that begin to move us toward some cultural matters themselves. Notice, first, that in terms of words used, Paul’s obvious greater concern in the first relationship is with the husband/householder. There are four times as many words to him as there are to the wife. In the other two relationships, however, the number of words goes in the opposite direction—two to one. This in itself suggests that the crucial matter for Paul is what Christ has done to the first relationship.

Second, it is important to note that in each case the first person addressed is the vulnerable and powerless one in the relationship. In the case of wives and slaves, they are to rethink their status in terms of their serving Christ, as they relate to the male head of the household. And note, finally, that the male householder is not told to take his proper role as leader of the household—that was in fact the assumed cultural reality that could so easily be abused. Rather, he is told to model the character of Christ in his relationships to his wife and slaves.

What kind of a world is this into which Paul is speaking, as he leaves the structures intact, but radically alters the relationships in terms of living cruciform?

II. Altered Relationships

1. Culture in general: some assumptions. This word culture is sometimes used in a way that suggests that there is an “oughtness” to culture. But that is an illusion. Culture simply is; it is not a matter of “should be.” Culture is what defines us; we do not define it, we simply try our best to describe it. Indeed, until recent times it was not even a subject of discussion, because it was simply assumed. But this is also our difficulty, because with regard to the first-century household, we must ferret out from a variety of legal and literary remains how people viewed the familia—which included the entire household, including slaves.

2. The Greco-Roman world. What we do know—and this has now been put into wonderfully convenient form by David deSilva in his recent book Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity (InterVarsity, 2000)—is that three basic assumptions defined the cultural milieu of the Greco-Roman world: Honor/shame; patronage; and kinship. The concept of honor and shame ruled everything; honor, or its opposite, disgrace, was regularly the basis for most moral appeals. A common sense as to what was honorable or shameful was the fabric that held Greco-Roman culture together.

Patronage refers to the mutual relationship that existed between unequals, in which each was understood to benefit the other. This is the cultural reality that most Americans in particular find utterly distasteful. We get ahead on the strength of our own ingenuity. We get what we want or need by buying and selling, and those who get ahead by buying favors are scorned. But such a worldview was simply nonexistent in the time of Paul.

Indeed, the Greco-Roman worldview was quite the opposite: it was predicated on the reality of a world that was bottom-heavy; where the top few percent were the elite or privileged, and where the rest of humankind was rather totally dependent on being in good standing with a patron. Seneca, in fact, said that the giving and receiving of favors was the “practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society.” Such a worldview is especially in place when you read Philemon, where Philemon was both Paul’s patron and friend. Because he was Paul’s patron, Paul asks for the privilege of hospitality; but because he was a friend, he presumes upon the reciprocity of such friendship to intercede for the life of Onesimus (since, in another sense, Philemon owed his life to Paul).

Kinship comes out of patronage, in the sense that to survive people needed to be in some kind of relationship with others, especially within a “family.” But this is also one of the difficulties we face when we come to the “house rules” in Ephesians, because it assumes a privileged household, and by the time of Paul, especially in the larger cities (Rome, Ephesus, Corinth), the majority of people would not have been attached to a household, but they would have lived in the large insulae (apartments), or in their own form of slums, including street people.

That is the world, then, that is presupposed by our text. It is a world predicated on honor/shame, patronage, and kinship, a world so radically different from ours culturally that it is difficult for us even to imagine our way back into their setting. But what interests us here is how these cultural realities played out in the Greco-Roman household.

III. Greco-Roman Households

On the cover of this journal is a photo of the typical insula. Far more people lived this way than in the household assumed by Paul in this passage. This insula is located among the ruins of Ostia, the ancient seaport of Rome. Because its harbor silted up, the city was simply abandoned; and although most of its marble and other important movable materials were carted off over the centuries, the ruins are especially well preserved. Such insulae would also most likely be the pattern for the home of artisans like Priscilla and Aquila, where the living and gathering of the church would be upstairs while the ground floor rooms that opened onto the street were shops. Such people usually did not have slaves, but rather servants or hired workers. And even though such households would often be the location of a “church that met in someone’s household,” this is not the basic pattern assumed in
Ephesians 5—which, as noted above, is probably related to the fact that Paul has just been writing to Philemon of Colossae and to the church that meets in his house.

Such a household would enjoy a domus, or villa, in which the privileged few—people like Philemon of Colossae or Stephanas and Gaius of Corinth—lived. This is clearly the kind of household presupposed by Paul in this passage. So we shall begin with the household itself, which assumes this kind of dwelling and which usually had a large number of people attached to it.

1. The basic sociological model here is clearly that of patronage; it was a mutual relationship between unequals in which each benefited the other. There are several aspects to this:

a. By law, the man, the paterfamilia, was the master of his household (thus the patron). Although he did not necessarily exercise it in a hurtful way, under Roman law his rule was absolute, in the sense that none of the others in the household had legal means to redress any grievances.

b. Usually, but not always, the paterfamilia required the household to serve his gods, since the gods were looked upon as responsible for “order,” for causing and maintaining things the way they are.

c. Such a household, unlike our understanding of home, was not a place of consumption, but of production. It was, therefore, again in sharp contrast to our culture, not thought of as a private haven (a refuge to return to after a day “out there”); rather, the Greco-Roman household was almost always semi-public (especially the atrium).

d. The householder and a few higher-level slaves had the only public roles. Here, for example, is the ideal about woman’s place found in Philo of Alexandria:

Market-places and council-halls and law-courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the boundary, and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood.

2. What it meant for a woman to enter such a household as a wife.

We know from a large number of census lists from Egypt that:

- The average age of a man when he married was 30, and a woman’s age was less than 18; she thus entered his household as a teenager, whom he had also to educate in the ways of his household.

- The reason for marriage was not “love” in our usual sense, but to bear legitimate children, to keep the family line going; failure to bear children, especially sons, was often a cause for divorce.

- Most men, although not all, were promiscuous: Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body; but wives to bear us legitimate children. (Demosthenes)

- Some wives, therefore, were promiscuous as well (although they always had to be more discreet, because their act would be considered infidelity, which was a matter of shame).

3. In this kind of household, the idea that men and women might be equal partners in marriage simply did not exist. Evidence for this can be seen in meals, which in all cultures serve as the great equalizer. In the Greek world, a woman scarcely ever joined her husband and his friends at meals; if she did, she did not recline at table (only the courtesans did that), but she sat on a bench at the end. And she was expected to leave after eating, when the conversation took a more public turn.

4. Slaves, of course, did all the work, both menial and clerical, including tutoring the children (they couldn’t have imagined a society without slaves). Slavery was not based on race, but initially on conquest in war, and eventually on economic need. Nonetheless, slaves had absolutely no rights before the law, evidenced by the fact that they could not even marry.

5. Finally, we return to the matter of religion. It is precisely because religion was regularly practiced in a household that, when such a householder became a follower of Christ, his familia would also as a matter of course follow Christ. Thus the familia (a Latin term for which we have no exact equivalent), which consisted both of blood relatives and all those attached to the household, both slave and freedperson, automatically became the nucleus/locus of the earliest Christian communities. And because there was already a semi-public aspect to the “home,” it also then became a place where many from outside the household would come and join in the worship—thereby creating a new kind of kinship, where Christ was now the new paterfamilia.

One final important note here. When such a householder became a follower of Christ, it was also invariably for him and his household a matter of shame—because he had chosen as his household religion to be a follower of a Jewish messianic figure who had died by crucifixion, which was one of the ultimate expressions of shame in that culture. What Paul does not do—indeed, it would never have occurred to him—is to add shame to shame by dismantling the structure of the household. That was simply in place. What he did was in some ways far more radical: he applied the gospel to this context.

What interests us, returning to our text, is how a new kinship based on the household’s common relationship to Christ as “head” of his body, the new household of God, affected all of these various relationships.

IV. The Household of God

As we move toward looking at the now-Christian household as God’s household, I want to point out some of the difficulties we have in reading this text, beginning with one of its more common abuses: using it to tell modern husbands that they...
should assume their proper role as head of their wives. Since the modern household looks almost nothing like the Greco-Roman household, this issue must be given a new cultural setting. The modern application is almost always put in terms of: "When you reach an impasse in decision-making, who has the authority to make the final choice?"

I don't know whether I hear Paul laughing or crying when that utterly modern reading is superimposed on this text—as though that were actually somehow derivable from the passage itself. And in any case, what would that look like for a couple of normally strong people like my wife, Maudine, and me, who are both second children, neither of whom likes to make decisions at all! In June we celebrated our forty-fifth anniversary, and I would say that we have never had such a decision-making stalemate in all these years. To be sure, we've had our moments—but never on this issue. Of course, we don't get anything done, either!

But let me quickly add that it is especially difficult for any of us even to imagine our way back into that Greco-Roman culture, let alone to have any sense of feeling for it. Indeed, in our context I almost always have a strong sense of need here to apologize to the singles—which in itself is evidence of how different from them we really are culturally. So let's say some things about ourselves and why we have such difficulty imagining that world.

We are heirs of a culture in which two major events in the past 300 years have radically altered Western culture forever, and which turned the basically paternal culture that preceded it completely on its head—namely, the so-called Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.

The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the individual, created a culture in which individual rights came to be regarded as the highest good. So much is this so, that by the late twentieth century the concept of individual rights had finally almost totally superseded that of the common good. But the Enlightenment alone did not create the structural changes in our understanding of home and family. After all, look at the British manor house, with its "enlightened" autocrat, which has taken such a beating and which turned the basically patronal culture that preceded it into the marketplace. Just one statistic tells us how radically countercultural? What Paul obviously did not do was to demolish the structures and create new ones. What was radically countercultural was to demolish the structures and create new ones. What was radical lay in his urging those who are filled with the Spirit and worship Christ as Lord to have totally transformed relationships within the household.

Thus wives and slaves, respectively, are to continue to submit and obey but now to do so as those who are thereby serving the Lord. And that changes things. But the more radical change is for the male householder, whose model is Christ and his love for the church. Christ is thus the "savior of the body" (a remarkable phrase indeed). In this case, however, Paul is not emphasizing salvation from sin (although that, too, of course is finally included). Rather, "savior" is the most common designation for the emperor. Used of God in the Old Testament (as God my Savior), it most often carries its more common sense of provider and protector (cf. 4:15-16).

Note then the only thing that is said to the household in terms of his relationship to his wife. Three times—at the beginning (v. 25), in the middle (v. 28), and at the end (v. 33)—Paul says the one truly radical thing: "Love your wife." That does not refer to either romance or sex, but to him giving his life in loving service to her. And note that there is regular emphasis on "his own wife."

The model is Christ's love for the church; look at how Paul expresses that. The imagery is that of a man taking a bride; Paul provides this with a marvelous echoing of Old Testament language from Ezekiel 16, where God betroths Israel, the naked and orphaned teenager, and washes her and dresses her in the finest of clothes.
Thus Paul now images the husband as treating his wife as just such a bride, adorned and glorious to behold. It is assumed that he will continue to provide leadership to the household, but his role will be radically transformed into one of caring for the people within the household for their own sakes, not having them around to serve his own self-interests. This is also why the Christian household, which is always a kind of nucleus of the larger Christian community, should always be understood as the first place where all the other imperatives are to find their first place of existence. The household, which was also the church, was the place where Christian life had to be put into practice.

We would do well here to go back and reread chapter 5 in light of this reality. Here is the more abbreviated version in the letter that is the companion to this one, excerpted from the full text of Colossians 3:12-4:1:

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

This, I would urge, is how these texts finally apply to us and to our homes. In the end, the structures are immaterial since they are predicated altogether on cultural givens that are simply not ours. Indeed, in light of this text, the structures are ultimately irrelevant, except that some structure must be in place or the household will fall apart. But these depend largely on the people involved, their own giftings, personalities, and how they relate to each other.

But whatever the structure, at issue is that we live Christlike in our relationships with one another in our homes.

God calls us to Peace, shalom to be filled with the Spirit, and thus submitting ourselves to one another in reverence to Christ to love with Christ’s love, by self-sacrificial giving of ourselves.

If we do that, the matter of structures will pale into insignificance.
If we all approach the text of Scripture, each having his or her own framework of understanding (even when we share a view of the Bible that it is inerrant and true in all it affirms and teaches), is there any hope that we can ever reach a “correct” or “objectively valid” interpretation, especially on passages that are so sensitive as those that deal with the place and privilege of women in the body of Christ today? Surely, no one particular set of presuppositions is to be favored in and of itself over any other set of presuppositions as the proper preparation for understanding a text. And no one starts with a tabula rasa, a blank mind. So does this mean we are hopelessly deadlocked with no possibility for a resolution?

But evangelicals do argue, nevertheless, that despite the acknowledgement that we all begin with a certain number of presuppositions, this does not demolish the possibility of our reaching a correct interpretation. Our pre-understandings are changeable and, therefore, they can and should be altered by the text of Scripture. Just as one must not involve one’s self in a hopeless contradiction by declaring that “absolutely, there are no absolutes,” in the same manner, to declare, “Objectively, there are no objective or correct meanings possible for interpreting a passage of Scripture,” is to decry exactly what is being affirmed. The way out of this quandary of both the relativist or the perspectivalist conundrum is to identify the presence of those aspects of thought that are self-evident first principles of thought that transcend every perspective, and act the same way for all people, all times, and all cultures. This is not to say that a correct, or an objective, interpretation is always reached in every attempted interpretation. But, for those who accept the God who has created all mortals and given us the gift of language when he gave us the “image of God,” it is not a stretch to say that a “correct” and “objective understanding” is possible for subsequent readers of the earlier revelation of God. The God who made the world is the same God who made our minds, thus, a direct connection between my mind and the world is possible. To deny objectivity would be self-defeating, for it would again reduce itself to a violation of the law of non-contradiction. Accordingly, there is real hope for realizing an objective meaning and deciding between various truth claims and even between differing perspectives and different worldviews.

All of this must serve as a preface to our remarks, for some have grown so weary of this discussion that they have just given up and decided that nothing more can be said that will move any others from their entrenched positions. But an evangelical must not either surrender to the status quo of a multiplicity of competing interpretations or reject simply out of hand honest discussion of the key points of Scripture on these matters. All correct interpretations will stand both the test of challenges as well as the test of time. So, let me review the scriptural teaching on the place and gifts God has given to women. Scripture, after all, is our only final arbiter on all such matters.

1. Genesis 2:18. Woman as possessing “power” or “strength” corresponding to the man.

Adam was regarded by his Creator as incomplete and deficient as he lived at first without the benefit of a proper counterpart. He was without community. God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). So, as Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 expressed it, “Two are better than one. . . .” Accordingly, in order to end man’s loneliness, God formed “for Adam [a] suitable helper” (Gen 2:21)—or at least that is the way most have rendered the Hebrew word ‘èzer.

Now, there is nothing pejorative about the translation “helper,” for the same word is used for God, but it is also variously translated as “strength,” as in “He is your shield and helper [= strength] (‘èzer)” in Deuteronomy 33:29.

But R. David Freedman has argued quite convincingly that our Hebrew word ‘èzer is a combination of two older Hebrew/ Canaanite roots, one, -z-r, meaning “to rescue, to save,” and the other, g-z-r, meaning “to be strong,” to use their verbal forms for the moment. The difference between the two is in the first Hebrew letter that is today somewhat silent in pronunciation and coming where the letter “o” comes in the English alphabet. The initial letter ghayyin fell together in the Hebrew alphabet and was represented by the one sign ג, or ‘ayvin. However, we do know that both letters were originally pronounced separately, for their sounds are preserved in the “g” sound still preserved in English today, as in such place names as Gaza or Gomorrah, both of which are now spelled in Hebrew with the same letter, ‘ayvin. Ugaritic, a Canaanite tongue, which shares about sixty percent of its vocabulary with Hebrew, did distinguish between the ghayyin and the ‘ayvin in its alphabet of thirty letters, as it represents the language around 1500 to 1200 BC. It seems that somewhere around 1500 BC the two phonemes merged into one grapheme and, thus, the two roots merged into one. Moreover, the Hebrew word ‘èzer appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament, often in parallelism with words denoting “strength” or “power,” thereby suggesting that two individual words were still being represented under the common single spelling. Therefore, I believe it is best to translate Genesis 2:18 as “I will make [the woman] a power [or strength] corresponding to the man.”

The proof for this rendering seems to be indicated in 1 Corinthians 11:10, where Paul argued, “For this reason, a woman ought to have power [or authority] on her head.” Everywhere Paul uses the Greek word exousia in 1 Corinthians it means “authority,” or “power.” Moreover, never is it used in the passive sense, but only in the active sense (1 Cor 7:37; 8:9; 9:4, 5). But in one of the weirdest twists in translation history, this one word was rendered “a veil, a symbol of authority” on her head!! But, as Katharine C. Bushnell showed in the early years of the twentieth century, the substitution of “veil” for “power” goes all the way back to the Gnostic Alexandrian teacher known as Valentinus,
who founded a sect named after himself sometime between AD 140 and his death on Cyprus in AD 160. His native tongue was Coptic, and, in Coptic, the word for “power” and the word for “veil” bore a close resemblance in sound and in print: ouershishī, meaning “power, authority,” and ouershoun, meaning “veil.” Both Clement and Origen also came from Alexandria, Egypt, so they too made the same mistake, possibly off the same Coptic type of manuscripts or influence of Valentinus in that city of Alexandria.

This debacle continues right down to our own day. For example, the NIV insists on saying “the woman ought to have authority over her own head.” This phrase has nothing to do with Genesis 3:16 or any other passage. The Hebrew expression is אֶזֶר קֶנֶגָּדוֹ, which is translated as “corresponding to him” in the NIV. The sense is that the woman is to be “equal to” her husband, not “subject to” him. The gender difference is not important in the text; it is important that the woman be equal to her husband. This is further clarified in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

3. Genesis 3:16. Women did not acquire sexual desires or develop “lust” for men as a result of the Fall!

This translation story has to be one of the oddest stories ever told. It is a travesty of errors, in which one man in particular, an Italian Dominican monk named Pagnino, published his translation in AD 1528 with the meaning “lust,” and thus occasioned a parade of mimics who have continued to follow his lead to this very day!

The Hebrew word תֶּשֶׁוּעַ only appears three times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 3:16, 4:7; Song 7:10). The third century BC Greek Septuagint rendered the two Genesis passages as ἀποστροφῆ (meaning “turning away”) and the Song of Solomon passage as ἐπιστροφῆ (meaning “turning to”). The Samaritan Pentateuch also rendered the two Genesis passages as “turning,” as did the Old Latin, the Coptic (Bohairic), and the Ethiopic version of AD 500.

Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, produced around AD 382, under the influence of Jewish rabbis, rendered Genesis 3:16, “Thou shalt be under the power of a husband, and he will rule over thee.” And so the history of an error began.
The result was that Pagnino’s version appeared in every English version. But the problem with Pagnino, as with those earlier deviations already representatively noted here, was this: they tended to depend on the rabbis for their sense of this infrequently used word in the Bible instead of depending on the Ancient Versions of the Scripture such as the Greek Septuagint, the Syriac Peshitto, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Old Latin, the Coptic Versions, and the Ethiopic. But where the rabbis or the Babylonian Talmud were followed, such as by Aquila’s Greek, Symmachus’s Greek, Theodotion’s Greek, or the Latin Vulgate, preference was given to senses like “lust,” “impulse,” “alliance,” or the like. Bushnell concludes this enormous piece of philological and translation detective work by saying, “Of the 28 known renderings of teshuqa . . . the word is rendered ‘turning’ 21 times. In the 7 remaining renderings, only 2 seem to agree; all the others disagree.” Even the early Church Fathers give evidence of knowing no other rendering for this Hebrew word than “turning.”

Therefore, let us be done once and for all with any idea that women, since the Fall, have lusted after men and that is why men must control them as best as they can. This must be a male fantasy at best, or a downright imposition of one’s own imagination on the text, because of certain interpretive schools of thought that grew up around a word that had limited usage in the Scriptures.

Eve “turned” from her Lord and instead placed all her dependency on her husband only to find out that he, too, as a fallen sinner, would take advantage of her and rule over her. Thus, instead of the resulting gender hierarchy being the norm that God had prescribed, it turns out that it displays the curse that has fallen on humanity, and on women in particular, because of the Fall described in Genesis 3:1-13.

4. Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22, etc. Women served at the tabernacle and ministered as prophetesses in the Old Testament.

“Women who served” at the tabernacle (Exodus 38:8 and 1 Samuel 2:22) offended the Greek translators of the Septuagint, so they rendered the phrase: “women who fast.” Bushnell quotes a Professor Margoliouth of Oxford as decrying such an idea with the words, “The idea of women in attendance at the Tabernacle is so odious that it has to be got rid of.” And so it was gotten rid of as the Authorized Version of the King James Testament. Its own Tanak that introduced these deviant views of women.

Nor was God any less displeased with an Abigail (1 Sam 25), who showed more discernment and wisdom than her foolish husband Nabal, who almost led that whole household into mortal danger had not Abigail intervened. Not only did King David praise her for preventing him from acting foolishly, but Scripture attests to the rightness of her actions over against those of her husband Nabal by saying that, ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal down and he died.

It was not Scripture (not even the Old Testament) that placed women in an inferior position, but a rabbinic set of traditions that had been infused later on more with pagan roots than with its own Tanak that introduced these deviant views of women.

5. 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Women are encouraged to lead in public prayers and to teach, but only after they have been taught.

It is none other than our Lord who encourages women to lead in public prayers, presumably at the time of the assembling of the worshipping community in 1 Timothy 2:9. Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, had just told the men that “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer” (v. 8), but he warned men to beware of leading outwardly in prayer while inwardly harboring hostility over some dispute or hidden anger. This is a problem men still need to handle.

From there Paul went on to draw a strong comparison. He began verse 9 with the Greek word hōsautōs, meaning “in like manner,” or “similarly.” The NIV and other versions tend to drop out or to soften this linking word (NIV, “I also want . . .”—just “also”??). The apostle wants the women to do something similar to what he had just instructed the men to do, viz., to pray in public. I say “in public,” because it is prayer with a “lifting up of holy hands” or outstretched as is common when publicly blessing God’s people. Thus, the Greek word for “in like manner” repeats the whole previous sentence, except the warning is different: men have trouble in overly internalizing anger and disputes while trying to pray effectively in public, whereas women have trouble sometimes not realizing God meant them to be beautiful and attractive to men, but not in this situation! Women must dress modestly while offering prayers in public. There is no concern here for what women may look like when they offer their own private prayers in their closet at home surely. Accordingly, the
Apostle wants women to participate with men in the public service of the Church by offering prayers. There can be no debate over this point unless someone knows how we can get rid of ἀποτυγχάνω in this text.

A. J. Gordon, one of the founders of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, quipped (after noting our passage here and 1 Cor 11:5 “[Every woman who prays or prophesies]: “It is quite incredible, on the contrary, that the apostle should give himself the trouble to prune a custom, which he desired to uproot, or that he should spend his breath condemning a forbidden method of doing a forbidden thing.”) Exactly so! God wanted women to participate in public services both in prayer and, as we will see, by prophesying; however, they were to be careful of their dress so as not to draw attention to themselves.

Now, the central point of this passage, one indeed that would have been revolutionary for Paul’s day, came in 1 Timothy 2:11—“Let a woman . . . learn!” This was a real bombshell for that day! Why would anyone ask women to do something like that? The Hebrews did not let their women learn publically, nor did the Greeks, Romans, or the pagans. Why should the Christians start such a strange custom since it had never been heard of or done by anyone before this?? But Paul is insistent: it is the only imperative in the passage. It is this verb, manthano, “let [the women] learn,” which would have drawn everyone’s attention and potential ire when this was first written. Unfortunately, we do not have a third person imperative form in English, so our “let [them] learn” sounds as if it is mere permission, but do not mistake the apostle’s intention here. He now orders all Christians to teach women the gospel in all its magnificence.

Yes, some respond, but, however she learns, she must do so “in silence,” and “in full submission” [apparently, argue some, to her husband!]. On the contrary, the “submission” is to her God or alternatively to her teacher, as encouraged in 1 Corinthians 16:16 or Hebrews 13:17. Likewise, it is not total “silence” that is required of the female learner any more than the same “silence” is required of men when they work or eat their lunches (2 Thess 3:12). In both cases the Greek word ἰδοῦμαι is better rendered as “quietness” or, even better, “a quiet spirit.” Thus, it is not an absolute silence that is required here of women any more than of men. But even with this word about the demeanor and attitudes of the female learner noted here, it would not commend itself to Jewish teaching of that time, for the Jewish attitude was: “Let the law be burned rather than committed to a woman” (y. Sotah 3:4, 19*); “He who teaches his daughter the law is as though he taught her sin” (m. Sotah 3:4). So taught the Talmud.

Fine, may agree some objectors, but why is it that Paul goes on to say in 1 Timothy 2:12 that he does “not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man . . .”? Had Paul suddenly changed his mind after demanding that women pray in public, prophesy in the body of believers, and be taught?

But, again, we say, if this is an absolute command allowing no exceptions, then why does Paul instruct women to teach other women in Titus 2:4? Should he not also have silenced Priscilla, whose name usually precedes Aquila’s in the Greek order of the names in the Book of Acts (e.g., Acts 18:26, despite how some of the versions put it the other way around), when Aquila clearly taught as well? And Timothy, whose father was a Gentile, attributed all his learning and teaching to his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5). Some insist they taught him before he was seven years old, as they oddly teach that women should not teach boys once they passed their seventh birthday. I have no idea why: They just simply assert it is so!

So what is the answer?

Yes, Paul is saying in this passage that women must not teach or exercise authority over a man, but the reasons he gives are found in the context that follows: verses 13 and 14. Paul expresses his strong preference and his own desires (though he too has the mind of the Lord even in this), for he uses the Greek word ἐπιτρέπω, “I do [not] permit.” This form is exactly the same form as Paul used in 1 Corinthians 7:7, “I wish that all of you were as I am [= unmarried].” But he does not use the imperative form of the verb now as he did when demanding that women be taught. So why does he not wish or permit women “to teach [note there should be no comma here, for the Greek text is without our systems of punctuation] or to control a man”?

The reasons are these: Adam was “shaped/formed/molded/fashioned” first. What will throw everything off track here is to view this first reason as an argument from “the orders of creation,” i.e., Adam was created first and then came Eve. If this argument were held consistently, then the animals might be demanding their rights since they got here even before Adam was created! But, Paul did not use the Greek word κτίζω, “to create,” but plassó, which is also used, as I believe it is used here, of “the orders of education,” not the orders of creation. It is the same root from which we today get our word for “plastic.” It refers in Greek to all sorts of formative thinking, teaching, and action in society, life, and both formal and informal teaching. Therefore, Paul’s restriction, or wish—however we desire to view it here—is on women only so long as they remain untaught. Presumably (for, how else can we avoid formulating an unnecessary contradiction between Paul’s teaching and his practices as taught and permitted elsewhere in Scripture?), as soon as the women were taught, they would be allowed to teach and exercise leadership much as some did in the examples already noted from the Old Testament.

Adam had a head start on Eve in education, for God walked and talked with him in the Garden of Eden until he got lonely. That is how Satan, the snake, was able to trick her. It appeared as if she had planned to hold her peace, but, when “The Serpent” (hāmāḥāš) subtly suggested that God had set up impossibly narrow rules and then even went on deliberately to distort what God had said, Eve almost involuntarily sprang to defend God as well as the couples’ own standing and thus was beguiled and drawn into the vortex of the Evil One’s trickery and deception. Why Adam did not intervene, taught as he was, I cannot say! He just let Eve rattle on, which was foolish! So that is what Paul teaches here: Adam himself was not “deceived,” but Eve was “thoroughly deceived” (the phrasing uses the same verb, but adds an intensifying preposition attached to the same verb for
Eve). The only way you can deceive or trick someone is to do so when they have not been taught. It is this Greek verb,  ἐπατάω, “to thoroughly deceive,” that shifts the word plassō from the secondary meaning “to form,” as in creation, to the primary meaning usually associated with this verb: “to shape [socially or educationally].” Thus, according to Paul, the two reasons women should not teach are: (1) they have not as yet had a chance to be taught, and (2) they can all too easily be tricked and deceived when they have not yet been taught. Unfortunately, Adam too sinned, but did so being fully cognizant of what was going on: he just ate! Eve, on the other hand, seemed to be really misled and attacked as if in an ambush, because she had not as yet had all the advantages of walking and talking with God in the garden of Eden or of learning as had Adam.

And then there is the extremely difficult verse of 1 Timothy 2:15, for which some thirty major interpretations exist. But the context is the determiner, so the flow of the argument is this: Do not attempt to put down women just because Eve was really deceived. Remember, God chose a woman through whom the promised child came and not a man! So, men, be careful and kind in your assessments and in your comments about these women that God has given to end our loneliness.

With this understanding of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, we can see now how Paul could also allow women to “pray and prophesy” in 1 Corinthians 11:5 and even be more emphatic in 1 Corinthians 14:31 where “all may prophesy” so that “all may learn” and “all may be encouraged.” The same “all” who were learning and being encouraged made up the identity of those who may prophesy—“all.” If some wish to cavil over the word “prophesy,” it can be noted in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that “everyone who prophesies speaks to mortals for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” That sounds like a definition of preaching, does it not?

6. 1 Corinthians 14:34-38. The Talmud, not the Old Testament law, taught that women must be silent and only talk at home.

The NIV, along with other translations, errs badly by interpretively giving a capital letter to the word “Law” in verse 34. [Editor’s note: NIV 2011 has removed the capital from “law” here.] The problem simply put is this: nowhere in the whole Old Testament does it teach or even imply what is claimed here! No law in the entire Old Testament, much less the Torah, can be cited to teach that a woman “must be in submission” and “remain silent” and, if she wants to know or ask about anything, she “should ask [her own] husband at home.” Women spoke freely in public in both testaments.

It was in the Jewish synagogues where women were not allowed to speak. Thus, the “law” referred to here may be the Jewish Oral Law, the same one Jesus referred to in the Sermon on the Mount, when he too corrected, “You have heard it said,” which he contrasted with the written word of Scripture. Yes, the Talmud taught that “out of respect to the congregation, a woman should not herself read the law publicly” (b. Meg. 23a), implying that a woman shamed herself if she spoke formally in a gathering of men.10 One scholar has singled out our interpretation of this passage as an example of a hermeneutical “fallacy” in interpretation. But let this scholar just point to the place in God’s “law” where any of these concepts are taught or even alluded to and he can retain his labeling of this view as a “fallacy.” But failing that, he should recognize the text calls for a repudiation of all alternative views that in some way or another demand that these three teachings are ordained and prescribed by God.

Thus, if Paul is not quoting from Scripture, but rather from a letter of inquiry that was sent to him by the Corinthians, asking if they too should observe such rules of quietude for women in a church which uses rabbinic teaching as its norm,11 can we show any other places where the same type of quoting from external sources is used by Paul as a basis for a following rebuttal? Yes, in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 8:8, and 10:23 Paul quotes an outside aphorism, “All things are lawful for me.” But Paul immediately refutes such a statement as he does in 1 Corinthians 14:36. Paul shouts, “What? “Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones [masculine plural] it has reached?” I would put this popularly: You can’t really be serious, can you? sneers Paul. That you guys are the only ones able to get the word of God?

If that is so, what was Pentecost all about? Did we not see the “now,” even if it was not all of the “not yet” of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29, where the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all regardless of their age, gender, or ethnicity? Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit came upon women as well as men: the text says so! And what shall we say about Psalm 68:11? There it proclaims: “The Lord gave the word: Great was the company of the [women] preachers!” for the word for “preachers” is a feminine plural form [Note the NASB rendering of this text]. Oh my, as one of my teachers once said, the easiest way to detect that you are dealing with a dead horse is if you prop it up on one end, the other end will fall down! That is what so many are doing with their interpretations of these texts.

7. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Women are to exercise authority and veils are not required.

We have already noted the Old Testament background for the women to have strength, power, or authority invested upon themselves in Genesis 2:18. That is, no doubt, what Paul was alluding to in 1 Corinthians 11:10. We also noted how false and thoroughly intrusive was the thought that a “veil as a sign of authority” was forced into the translations of this verse from the days of the Gnostic religions both in Paul’s day and in subsequent times. Paul did not, nor should we, allow for any parts of such substitutions for the Word of God that stands written! Away with all impositions of a “veil” or veiled references!

Now, at the heart of this passage in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is Paul’s desire to stop the practice that had come over from the Synagogue, where men veiled their heads in the worship service. The head covering that was used was called a tallit, worn by all men during the morning prayers and on Sabbath days and Holy Days. This tallit was also worn by the kazzan whenever he prayed in front of the ark, and by the one who was called up to read the
scroll of the law at the “reading desk,” known as the almemar. The hazzan was the chief leader of the Synagogue. Remarkable, as well, is the fact that the Romans also veiled when they worshipped, so both the Jewish and Roman converts would have been accustomed to such veiling practices as part of the liturgy of the worship service.

From the Jewish perspective, Paul was anxious to make clear that such a veiling of the tallit was not only a sign of reverence to God, but, unfortunately, it was also a sign of condemnation for the sin and of the guilt of its wearer before the Almighty. But how could such signs be worn when “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”?¹²

Paul will, thus, forbid men to be veiled. He will permit a woman to be veiled, but it is only by permission, not by obligation that he does so, for his real preference here also is for women likewise to be unveiled before God, men, and angels, especially when women are addressing God in prayer. On the contrary, women should not feel embarrassed about having their heads uncovered, for their hair is given to them as their “glory.” In fact, the Church has no prescribed rule or custom about needing a veil.

Men and women are not independent of one another (1 Cor 11:12), for God made woman “for [dia with the accusative] the man,” while God now brings all men “through [dia with the genitive] the woman.” Anyway, “All things are of God,” so who gets bragging rights or one-up-manship here?

**Conclusion**

The Scriptures are far from being repressive, hostile, or demeaning to women; instead they constantly elevate women and give them places of honor and credit along with their male counterparts. Even in the matter of both males and females being given a head of hair, they are equal. In 1 Corinthians 11:15, the woman is given her hair anti (“in place of”; “instead of”) a chapeau, hat, or covering. And, if anyone is unnerved over the whole matter of requiring women to wear some kind of covering, then Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:16, “We have no such practice” that requires women to wear a covering. Note even here, how the translations reverse the whole meaning of the Greek text and say, as the NIV says, “We have no other practice” (emphasis ours), which implies this is the only one, and that is that women must wear a covering when they worship. How difficult it is to reverse some habits and traditions, much less some translations!!

From insights such as these gained in a lifetime devoted to study of the Bible, I have realized, indeed, that together men and women are “joint heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet 3:7, 11), submitting themselves to the Lord and to each other (Eph 5:21). Each owes to the other love, respect, and an appreciation for the sphere of authority given to each one as part of the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are never gender-coded in Scripture, but they are meant for the blessing of the whole body of Christ.

May Christ’s Church take the lead in setting forth a whole new standard for the place and ministry of women even against a confusing background and cacophony of a radical women’s movement of our day that has other goals in mind than those posed for us in these Scriptures. *Sola Scriptura* must be the rallying point once again as it has been time after time in history. May Christ’s Church find the rest, comfort, and admonition of Scripture on the teaching of women and their ministries to be God’s final word for our day as it has been in the past!

**Notes**

1. I am indebted for the argument that follows to a marvelous recent work by Thomas Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (Advantage Books, 2004).
6. Theodotion’s rendering is “turning,” as Katharine C. Bushnell explains in her *God’s Word to Women* (often privately printed since the final edition came in 1923) ¶ 128-145. However, Symmachus’s Greek rendering followed Aquila’s suggestion by rendering it by the Greek word, hormé, meaning “impulse.” Aquila, noted Bushnell, was a proselyte to Judaism, who followed the Jewish scholars of the second century. The *Talmud*, which is technically not a translation of the Bible, but a listing of traditions, teaches that there were ten curses pronounced over Eve, and in the fifth, sixth, and ninth of these curses, the word, “lust,” is used to render the Hebrew word tēshiqā. Thus, in Origin’s *Hexapla* (a six column listing of all the variant readings of Scripture he knew about), Aquila’s column rendered the word there “coalition,” or “alliance,” which Bushnell says is not all that an unnatural sense “since Eve is represented as turning from God to form an alliance with her husband.”
10. See Bushnell, *God’s Word to Women*, ¶ 201-02.
11. Bushnell, *God’s Word to Women*, ¶ 201: “The Apostle Paul is here quoting what the Judaisers in the Corinthian church are teaching—who themselves say women must keep silence because Jewish law thus taught.” Her proof is detailed in 203ff.
12. Bushnell, *God’s Word to Women*, ¶ 241: “Where the practice has ceased of veiling in sign of guilt and condemnation before God and His law, this whole teaching, in its literal sense, has no application.”

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First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, 
and Paul’s Use of Creation Narratives

John Jefferson Davis, Spring 2009

First Timothy 2:11–15, and especially verse 12, has long been a focal point in modern discussions of the ordination of women. Traditional reservations about the ordination of women as pastors and elders have generally made two assumptions in the interpretation of this passage: (1) that the meaning of authentein in verse 12 is clearly known and should be translated simply as “have authority,” and (2) that the appeal to the creation narrative naming Adam and Eve in verses 13 and 14 implies a universal, “transcultural” principle that prohibits the exercise of ecclesiastical authority by women over men in all (or some) circumstances.

The purpose of this article is to argue that both of these assumptions are faulty, and that 1 Timothy 2:11–15, rightly understood lexically and contextually, does not teach any universal prohibition of the ordination of women as pastors or elders. The primary focus of this discussion will be the second assumption, regarding the appeal to the Genesis creation account of Adam and Eve.1 It will be argued that Paul’s contextual and church-specific appeal to creation texts makes it not only possible, but preferable to see the limitation on women’s teaching roles in 1 Timothy 2 as a circumstantial and not universal prohibition. Before proceeding with this analysis, however, a few observations will be made regarding the meaning of authentein in verse 12.

**Authentein: “have authority” or “domineer”?**

It is well known that authentein in verse 12, a ἀπαξ λεγομένον in the New Testament, has been the focus of considerable attention among lexicographers and biblical scholars in recent decades. Those who favor “traditional” understandings of male ecclesiastical leadership have tended to translate this word in the neutral sense of “have authority” or “exercise authority,” as, for example, George Knight in a widely cited article of 1984.2 In 1988, Leland Wilshire, examining 329 occurrences of this word and its cognate authentēs, showed that, prior to and contemporary with the first century, authentein often had negative overtones such as “domineer” or even “murder” or “perpetrate a crime”; only during the later patristic period did the meaning “to exercise authority” come to predominate.4

In a 2004 study, Linda Belleville5 carefully examined the five occurrences of authentein prior to or contemporary with Paul and rendered these texts as follows: (1) the Scholia (fifth to first century BC) to Aeschylus’s tragedy *Eumenides*: “commit acts of violence”; (2) Aristonics (first century BC), “the author” (of a message); (3) a letter of Tryphon (first century BC), “I had my way with him” (contra Knight); (4) Philodemus (first century BC), “powerful lords”; (5) the poet Dorotheus (first and second centuries AD) in an astrological text, “Saturn . . . dominates Mercury.” It is clear, especially in instances 1, 3, 4, and 5 above, that a neutral meaning such as “have authority” is not in view.

Belleville also notes, significantly, that a variety of premodern versions of the Bible6 translate this word not simply as “have authority” or “exercise authority,” but with some negative sense, e.g., the Old Latin (second to fourth centuries AD): “I permit not a woman to teach, neither to dominate (dominari) a man”; the Vulgate (fourth to fifth centuries AD), “neither to domineer over a man”; the Geneva Bible (1560 ed.), “neither to usurpe authority over a man”; the Bishops Bible (1589), “neither to usurpe authority over a man”; and the King James Bible (1611), “nor usurp authority over a man.” In none of these cases can the translators be suspected of having a modern, “feminist” bias in translating authentein with a negative sense of “domineer” or “usurp authority.” These instances show that the “traditional” translation of authentein as “exercise authority” is neither uniform nor self-evident in the history of interpretation; if anything, it could be argued that the burden of proof is on the (now) “traditional” view to justify its translation choice.

It should also be observed that Paul, had he the ordinary exercise of ecclesiastical leadership and authority in mind, had at his disposal a number of words that could have served this sense, notably *proistēmi.* This word, occurring eight times in the New Testament and used six times by Paul in reference to church leaders (1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17; 1 Thess 5:12; Rom 12:8), can have the senses of “manage, conduct, rule, direct, be concerned about,” and connotes the “normal” and “expected” type of leadership that should be exhibited by those selected to lead. The fact that a highly unusual and ambiguous word is chosen in 2:12 would be consistent with an unusual set of circumstances in the context to which the text is addressed. It will be argued below that these circumstances, as indicated by clear references in the Pastoral Epistles themselves, involve women who are being deceived by false teachers and, as such, are not suitable for the exercise of teaching or ruling authority in Ephesus.


Paul’s Use of the Creation Narratives

The major focus of this article is an examination of Paul’s appeal to the Genesis creation narratives, with a view to showing that, in this (1 Tim 2:11–15) and other passages, the apostle refers to these texts with the local circumstances and the problems of specific churches in view. It is here argued that previous discussions of this passage have not given adequate recognition to the context-specific way in which Paul applies the creation texts.
When writing to the church in Ephesus, the apostle states that women are not to teach or have (NIV)/usurp (KJV) authority over men because “Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (vv. 13–14). Paul appeals to the Genesis narratives, describing the human situation both prior to the fall and immediately subsequent to it (Gen 2:18–25, 3:1–7). It has been argued that, since verse 13, referring to the chronological priority of Adam over Eve in creation, is both a creation narrative and before the fall, the conclusions drawn from it by the apostle are not simply reflective of cultural circumstances or the sinful human condition, but are normative for all times and places and, consequently, bar the ordination of women to certain offices in all circumstances. Paul’s reasoning appeals to a basic order of creation and not merely to a limited cultural context or to the practices of particular churches. For those who accept the authority of canonical Scripture and who take Adam and Eve to be historical individuals, such considerations would appear to be weighty and even insuperable objections to the ordination of women as senior pastors or elders. Even if Adam and Eve were considered not to be historical individuals, but rather archetypal representatives of the first human beings, it could still be argued that the implications that Paul draws from these accounts are of transcultural validity precisely because they are drawn from prelapsarian creation texts.

The foregoing argument, however, fails to take into account the way in which the apostle Paul draws implications from creation texts in ways that are specifically related to his pastoral and theological concerns for specific churches and congregations. It should be observed that, in other church settings, the apostle derives different applications from these same creation texts. For example, in writing to the church in Rome, Adam, not Eve, is singled out as the representative figure who brought guilt and death upon the entire human race (Rom 5:12–21); Eve is not so much as mentioned. Adam is singled out as the representative head of the fallen human race, just as Christ is presented as the second Adam, the “one who was to come” (v. 14). The focus on Adam is consistent with Paul’s purpose in setting forth his gospel as a gospel for the entire human race, for Jew and Gentile alike. As he had previously stated in 3:9, “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin”; the righteous standards of the law hold “the whole world accountable to God” (3:19, emphasis added). Hence, there is a universal need for the gospel. Later, in the epistle to the Romans, he deals with matters such as eating meat and observing special days (14:5–23) that are of internal concern to a congregation of both Jewish and Gentile converts, but, in the opening chapters (1–3), he is especially concerned with the “global” and universal relevance of the gospel, and consequently reads Genesis 3 in terms of Adam’s disobedience that led to condemnation for all people (5:18).

In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul makes different applications of the creation narratives that are specifically related to the problems of this local assembly. In giving directives about the proper conduct of women in public worship (1 Cor 11:2–16), Paul, while pointing to the creational grounding (v. 8, “woman [came] from man”; cf. Gen 2:21–23), qualifies this in the direction of the mutual dependence of men and women (vv. 11–12). Evidently, the apostle expects that the women in Corinth will continue to pray and prophesy in the assembly (11:5), but should do so in an orderly and respectful way that honors the priority of creation—however the latter is to be understood.

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle addresses the danger of being deceived by false teachers. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, he writes that “I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning [Gen 3:1–6], your minds might be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” by the “super apostles” who are preaching a “different Jesus” (vv. 4–5, emphasis added). The point to be noticed is that Paul draws a parallel here between the deception of Eve and the danger of the entire Corinthian congregation (or its [male] leaders) being deceived by false teachers. In this text, the figure of Eve is clearly taken to apply to the entire congregation and not specifically to the women within it, as though they, merely by virtue of their gender, were uniquely susceptible to such deception. This is to be contrasted with the reference to the deception of Eve in 1 Timothy 2:12, when Paul is writing to a church in Ephesus in which he is concerned that some of the younger widows have already “turned away to follow Satan” (1 Tim 5:15), and is aware of “weak-willed women” in Ephesus who are burdened by sins and have not learned the truth, their homes being infiltrated by false teachers (2 Tim 3:6–7).

This comparison of 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:12 shows that Paul does not have a “one size fits all” hermeneutic when reading and applying the Genesis narratives of creation and fall: “Eve” can be seen as a figure of women in Ephesus or as a figure for an entire church in Corinth—because the local circumstances differ, though false teaching is a danger in both settings. Applications are drawn from Genesis in a church-specific and contextually sensitive way.

Another example of Paul’s contextually sensitive application of creation texts may be seen in the different ways controversies concerning food are addressed when writing to the congregations in Ephesus and Rome. In 1 Timothy 4:1–5, written to Ephesus, Paul’s response to false teachers who are forbidding marriage and enjoining abstinence from certain foods is that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (v. 4). The principle being invoked is clearly reflective of the teaching found in Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The institution of marriage and all types of food—“kosher” or “non-kosher,” meat or vegetables, sacrificed to a pagan idol or not—are, intrinsically in and of themselves “clean,” reflecting the goodness of God’s creation itself. Paul strongly asserts this principle as over against the false teachers.

In writing to the Roman congregation, however, on similar issues of permissible foods and observance of special days (Rom 14), Paul takes a somewhat different pastoral approach because of different circumstances. As with the Ephesian congregation, the apostle alludes to the creational principle of the goodness of all food (14:4, “nothing is unclean in itself,” cf. Gen 1:31), but in the Roman church there are other dynamics to be considered: the practices and scruples of Jewish and Gentile converts whose different religious and cultural backgrounds are creating problems of conscience and troubling the unity of the church. While in principle the Gentile
believers in Rome could insist on their “creational right” to eat meat, Paul urges them to forbear in Christian love out of regard for the consciences of their Jewish brethren. In this circumstance, Paul urges that a central redemptive concern for the unity of the church and respect for Christian conscience in secondary matters take precedence over any individual’s “creation right” to eat meat. While Paul is not denying the validity of the creational goodness of meat—as previously noted, in Romans 14:4 he had already stated that “no food is unclean in itself”—this principle is not applied to the life of the churches without regard to the particular circumstances of the congregation in question. In Ephesus, Paul can be more insistent on the “creational right” to eat all foods because the denial of this right is coming from false teachers who are in danger of abandoning the faith and following deceiving spirits (1 Tim 4:1). Here, the issue of food is implicated with the preservation of the faith itself. In Rome, on the other hand, there is no indication in Romans 14 that either party—Jew or Gentile—is in danger of abandoning the faith, being deceived by demons, or drifting in the direction of heretical doctrine.

Further, the foregoing discussion of food controversies in two churches addressed by Paul suggests that, just as in one circumstance a creational right to eat (1 Tim 4) does not lead to an unqualified permission to eat in another instance (Rom 14), so it could also be the case that a creationally endorsed prohibition (1 Tim 2:12–13) of women exercising ecclesiastical authority does not imply prohibition under different circumstances. In both cases, it is here being argued, Paul applies creation texts in a contextually sensitive manner and in a way that is concerned to preserve the apostle’s core values: sound doctrine and the preservation of the apostolic deposit of faith, the unity of the churches, and harmony and good order in the Christian family.

On this reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Paul is indeed prohibiting women in Ephesus from exercising ecclesiastical authority and would not support their “ordination,” the reason being that false teachers pose a grave threat in Ephesus and women are being misled by false teachers and straying after Satan. Paul sees a parallel between the deception of Eve in Genesis 3 and the deception of women in Ephesus, just as he sees a parallel between the deception of Eve in Genesis and the deception of the congregation in Corinth. In different circumstances, where women are sound in the faith and their lives consistent with the apostolic core values of congregational unity and the harmony and good order of the family, the way would be open for their exercise of ecclesiastical leadership. The general, “transcultural” lesson that should be drawn, then, from the Genesis texts, in light of their contextually differentiated uses in 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Corinthians 11, would be that whenever and wherever either women or men are being misled by false teachers, they should not be ordained as church leaders; soundness in the faith is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for service as an elder or deacon (1 Tim 3:1–13).

The Question of Homosexual Practices
At this point, it seems appropriate to consider a possible objection to the foregoing line of argument. Those holding a “traditional” understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 raise the concern that the same logic that would argue that creationally grounded prohibitions concerning women in the church do not necessarily apply in all contexts could be extended to argue that biblical prohibitions against homosexual practices grounded in creation are not necessarily forbidden in all circumstances either. In short, do arguments for women’s ordination inevitably lead to justifications for homosexuality? The question is a serious one and deserves a careful answer, for trends in some mainline American churches give plausibility to such concerns.

The response to this concern, however, is to observe that, in the course of redemptive history and in the breadth of the biblical canon, there is uniformity in the biblical rejection of homosexual practices while there is diversity in the types of public leadership roles played by women in the Old and New Covenant communities. In the case of homosexual practices, there is one consistent position reflected throughout the Scriptures in both testaments; the biblical assessment of homosexuality is uniformly negative. There are no historical or cultural contexts mentioned in Scripture in which homosexuality is portrayed in a positive light. The creational distinctions between male and female (Gen 1:27) which are foundational for the prohibitions against homosexuality have the same implications for all cultural contexts.

In the case of women’s leadership roles, however, there is significant diversity within the canon itself. In 1 Timothy 2, women’s roles are restricted, it is here argued, in light of the local problems of women being misled by false teachers and, plausibly, teaching men in a domineering fashion. Elsewhere, one can recall the prominent leadership roles exercised by Deborah the prophet (Judg 4), Huldah the prophet (2 Kgs 22), Miriam the sister of Moses (Exod 15:20–21), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), the four daughters of Philip who were prophets (Acts 21:9), and Phoebe (Rom 16:1) to be reminded of the ways that women have been used by God at different times in biblical history; there is no hint in the canonical texts that the activities of these women were viewed in a negative light. This diversity—the fact that women’s authoritative leadership is sometimes prohibited (1 Tim 2) and sometimes permitted (Deborah, Judg 4)—indicates that circumstances factors are in play, not merely “transcultural, creational” norms that are applied without regard to local problems.

Deborah’s Leadership
The case of Deborah is especially relevant to this discussion of Paul’s use of creation texts in relation to leadership roles for women in the covenant community. The biblical text states that Deborah was judging Israel at that time (Judg 4:4). She “held court” under “the palm of Deborah” in the hill country of Ephraim and the Israelites “came to her to have their disputes decided” (Judg 4:5); the biblical author clearly understands her to be exercising judicial authority. The verb used to indicate Deborah’s activity (shaphat) is the same verb used to describe the judicial activity of Moses (Exod 18:13) and Samuel (1 Sam 17:6). The judges who were to be appointed in the various tribes and towns according to the law of Moses (Deut 16:18–20) were to administer justice impartially and were to be respected as serving the “Lord your God” (Deut 17:12) and representing his authority. As Robin Davis has pointed out in a recent study, the parallels...
between Moses and Deborah are numerous and striking: both Moses and Deborah functioned as judges (Exod 18:13, Judg 4:4); both sat for judgment, and the people came to them (Exod 18:13, Judg 4:3); both proclaimed the word of the Lord (Exod 7:16, Judg 4:6); both were prophets (Deut 18:15, Judg 4:4); both pronounced blessings (Exod 39:43, Judg 5:24); both pronounced curses in the name of the Lord (Deut 27:15, Judg 5:23); both had military generals (Joshua, Barak); both gave instructions to the people as to how the Lord would defeat the enemies (Exod 14:14, Judg 4:6); in both cases, the Lord caused the enemy to panic and flee (Exod 14:24, Judg 4:15); God’s victory is told first in prose (Exod 14, Judg 4), then in poetry (Exod 15, Judg 5); Moses (and Miriam, Exod 15:1) and Deborah (and Barak, Judg 5:1) led the people in worshipping God after their great deliverance.12

In Judges, Deborah appears as a “second Moses” figure whose authority derives from the God of Sinai.

The case of Deborah poses a special dilemma for the “traditional” reading of 1 Timothy 2:12: If it is true that Paul’s use of creation texts is intended to prohibit all women in all circumstances from exercising authority over men in the covenant community, then the apostle is forbidding what God has in this instance permitted—and this would amount to a contradiction within the canon itself.

Various ways of evading this problem are not convincing. Was Deborah usurping authority rather than exercising it legitimately? There is no indication in the book of Judges, the Old Testament as a whole, or the New Testament that God disapproved of Deborah’s activities; on the contrary, Deborah is to be understood in light of the programmatic statement in Judges 2:16 that God, in his mercy, “raised up judges who saved them”; her leadership is a notable example of exactly such divinely empowered activity.

Was Deborah not really “ruling” or “judging” Israel at this time, but merely dealing with people privately when they came to her, as one scholar has suggested?13 This argument is unconvincing for three reasons: (1) it overlooks the usage of the verb shaphat, which is also used to describe the activities of Moses (Exod 18) and Samuel (1 Sam 17:6), both of whom engaged in public and authoritative judging; (2) it overlooks the plain reference to Deborah’s place of judgment,14 the palm tree of Deborah, a public location, not a private one, such as a home; and (3) it overlooks the plain statement of the text that Deborah was judging Israel, a reference to the nation as a whole, not just to various individuals. Deborah’s leadership, like that of the other judges, was widely recognized and transcended tribal boundaries.

Was Deborah only God’s “second best” because the men of Israel would not lead?15 This view overlooks the explicit texts such as Judges 5:1 (“When the princes in Israel take the lead . . . Praise the Lord!”) and 5:9 (“My heart is with Israel’s princes, with the willing volunteers among the people”) where the leaders of Israel are commended, not rebuked, for answering God’s call through Deborah.

Nor is it the case that the Deborah texts can be discounted by suggesting that she exercised only “civil” and not “spiritual” authority. This notion of the separation of civil and religious authority makes no sense in the theocratic life of Israel at this time. Such a reading imports into the text modern notions of “separation of church and state” that are foreign to it. Deborah issues commands to Barak in the name of the Lord (Judg 4:6, “The Lord, the God of Israel commands you”); the kings of Israel were to rule on the basis of the law of Moses (cf. Deut 17:18, “he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law [law of Moses]”), not according to some secular or merely “civil” law.16

The implication of the foregoing observations is that Deborah should be seen as a positive and not negative example of a woman exercising authority in the covenant community. Deborah may be unusual and somewhat exceptional in biblical history, but she is a positive example notwithstanding. Since God himself raised up Deborah as a judge, and that which God chooses to do cannot be intrinsically wrong, it cannot be intrinsically wrong for a woman to exercise authority over a man in ecclesiastical contexts.

The case of Deborah, seen as a positive example, is then consistent with a recognition of the circumstantial nature of the prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2:12; not all women are prohibited by God from exercising authority over men at all times in the church. The reading here presented then removes the appearance of a “contradiction within the canon” and provides hermeneutical space for the recognition of other “Deborahs” who may be called by God to lead from time to time.17

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, the following translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is proposed: “I do not permit a woman to teach in a way that domineers over men.” This rendering of the verse is consistent with the following considerations: (1) the unusual—in fact, singular—usage of authentein in the New Testament, suggestive of unusual circumstances, rather than Paul’s more usual word proistēmi for church leadership; (2) the negative connotations for authentein found in four of the five uses of the word in texts prior to or contemporary with Paul; (3) the translations of “dominee” or “usurp authority” found in earlier versions of the Bible, such as the Old Latin, Vulgate, Geneva, Bishops, and King James; (4) the grammatical and syntactical observation that, in the New Testament, pairs of nouns or noun substitutes (e.g., infinitives) connected by a “neither . . . nor” (de . . . oude) construction can define a progression of related ideas or define a related purpose or goal;18 (5) the church-specific way in which Paul cites and applies creation texts, as seen in the comparisons of 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Corinthians 11:3 in matters of deception by false teachers, and 1 Timothy 4:4 and Romans 14 in the matter of permissible foods; and (6) the positive example of Deborah (Judg 4, 5) in canonical history as a woman raised up by God to exercise leadership and authority—not just over a local assembly, but over the covenant nation.

It is also argued that the proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 is consistent with and supportive of what might be termed Paul’s “fundamental concerns for faith and order” in the Pastoral Epistles and his ministry generally: (1) the preservation of sound doctrine and the apostolic faith, (2) the unity and good order of the churches, and (3) the solidarity and harmony of Christian families. It is evident that, in the Pastorals, the apostle is concerned with problems that are arising on all three fronts. The problem of false teaching is frequently mentioned (1 Tim 1:4–7; 4:1–3, 7; 5:15; 6:3–5; 2 Tim 2:16–18, 25–26; 3:8–9; 4:3–4; Titus 1:10–
In terms of family life, there are problems with women being deceived by false teachers (2 Tim 3:6); some of the younger widowers have already strayed after Satan (1 Tim 5:15); and some false teachers are even upsetting whole families (Titus 1:11).

In the face of these problems in the community at Ephesus, Paul stresses the importance of sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:3, 10; 4:6, 16; 2 Tim 1:14; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), good order in the church (1 Tim 3:15; cf. 1 Cor 14:40, “decently and in order”), and good order in the family (1 Tim 3:4–5; 12; 5:14; Titus 1:6). As Paul contemplates the end of his own life’s work and the transition to the second generation of Christian leadership, he is naturally concerned to “tighten up the ship” in its faith and order in order that the churches might weather the storms that are to come in the last days (2 Tim 3:1; cf. 4:3–4).

In light of these local problems, where women are being misled by false teachers and where some women may be teaching in a domineering, abrasive, or alienating fashion that creates conflict and division in the assembly and in marriages, the apostle does not permit such women to be placed in positions of leadership in the church. On the other hand, in other circumstances, where gifted women are sound in the faith and have a way of teaching that is not dividing the assembly or marriage relationships in the church—where the apostle’s “fundamental concerns for faith and order” are satisfied—then the way would be clear to recognize the calling of such gifted women and set them apart for leadership in the church.

Arguably, Deborah during the period of the judges could be viewed as an example of such a gifted and called woman whose ministry was consistent with the “fundamental concerns for faith and order”: raised up by the Spirit of God; administering the law of Moses with justice, impartiality, and discernment; recognized and accepted by the community, and with no indications in the biblical text that her ministry created domestic difficulties with her husband, Lappidoth. Churches today would be well advised to reconsider the “traditional” readings of 1 Timothy 2:12 that bar women from certain leadership roles in the church. Traditional readings of the text may be in danger, however unintentionally, of quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), of stifling the service of gifted women, and of depriving the churches of able leadership at a time in redemptive history (Acts 2:17) when the people of God should be expecting more, not fewer, “Deborahs.”

Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper, Paul’s authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is assumed.
2. A word occurring only once.
7. For an extensive review of the recent scholarly literature discussing this difficult passage (1 Cor 11:2–16), see Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchist nor Egalitarian,” 295–302.
8. See the insightful discussions of William J. Webb, Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), esp. 135–84 on the interplay between creation, new creation, and cultural elements as they relate to the biblical statements on women and homosexual practices. Webb’s nuanced approach is consistent with the argument of this article, but he does not appear to develop my “context-specific use of creation texts” approach in a focused way.
10. Traditional interpreters of 1 Tim 2:13 (“Adam was formed first, then Eve”) see in this an appeal to the order of creation and the principle of primogeniture, or the firstborn being worthy of greater honor. But it should be noted that Paul can also apply the primogeniture principle in context-specific ways. For example, in Rom 3:1–2 and 9:4–5, he reminds his Gentile readers of the spiritual privileges (law, covenants, temple worship, etc.) of Israel; Israel is God’s “firstborn” in the order of redemptive history. Gentiles should not boast over the branches because “you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (11:18), yet the thrust of the book of Romans as a whole is to argue for the spiritual equality of both Gentiles and Jews before God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:28–30, cf. Gal 3:28). The “Adam was formed first” reference in 1 Tim 2:13 can plausibly be understood as a context-specific response and corrective to a situation in which women were not acting respectfully toward men in the Ephesus congregation and are being rebuked for their (domineering) behavior.
11. Robert Boling comments on this text: “Judging. That is, functioning with reference to a recognized office . . . Deborah’s Palm. That she had a tree named after her suggests a setting in which she was responsible for Yahwist oracular inquiry . . . the judgment. Heb. ham-mishpat; here it stands for her decision in response to a particular inquiry.” Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary, AB 6A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 95.
Theological Seminary, Jan 2006, 1–7. Davis cites other parallels in addition to those mentioned above.


16. With reference to Deborah, Thomas Schreiner (“The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2006], 211) recognizes her prominent leadership role, but then points, correctly, to the distinction in the New Testament between the roles of prophets (as in Corinth) and elders: The prophets ostensibly did not have the same type of authority by way of continuing office as did the elders in matters of teaching. This distinction, even if correct, misses the main point with respect to Deborah: She had both “charismatic” authority as a prophet and a recognized office as a judge. The two aspects were combined in her case, demonstrating that God can approve the exercise of authority under both aspects by a duly called and gifted woman.

17. Acts 2:17, “In the last days . . . your sons and daughters shall prophesy,” indicates that, in the New Testament age, the age of the outpouring of the Spirit, the church should be expecting more Deborahs, not fewer! What may have been exceptional in the Old Covenant can become usual in the New, fulfilling Moses’ hope that, at some time in the future, “all the Lord’s people” would be prophets (Num 11:29).

18. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 218, gives as examples Matt 6:20, “where thieves neither break in nor steal” (i.e., break in with a view to steal); Acts 17:24, God “neither dwells in temples made with human hands nor is served by human hands” (i.e., dwells in human temples with a view to being served by human hands). The translation proposed here is similar to Belleville’s renderings: “I do not permit a woman to teach with a view to dominating a man,” or, “I do not permit a woman to teach a man in a dominating way,” 219.

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Will Boys Be Boys and Girls Be Girls?
Correcting Gender Stereotypes Through Ministry with Children

David M. Csinos, Spring 2010

Human beings begin to develop gender identities very early in life as they pick up on cues and clues given off from the sociocultural contexts in which they find themselves. As people and institutions demonstrate socially appropriate ways of being male or female, children become apprentices and learn what it means to be a boy or girl in their culture. Often, the notions of gender1 that are offered to children involve inequality between the sexes and create oppressive limitations for people of one sex while offering unfair advantages and freedoms to those of the other sex.

For too long, the church has not attempted to address issues of gender identity formation in children. While theologians have begun to examine issues of sex and gender, not enough theological thought has been given to the ways young people come to be gendered as they pick up on cultural notions of maleness and femaleness. As a result, some faith communities, unknowingly or not, perpetuate oppressive gender stereotypes and roles as adults teach children—whether tacitly or explicitly—what it means to be a female or male in the contemporary church and world.

Yet, the church is capable of reforming itself as it begins to address these issues by consulting theology and social science for insights into sex, gender, and identity and by critically analyzing the ways in which children form gender identities. In this article, I will do just this. I begin with a discussion of how two significant twentieth-century theologians—Karl Barth and Karl Rahner—have thought of gender. While these two men come from different traditions (Reformed and Catholic), they both offer important theological insight into gender that is useful in developing strategies for correcting harmful gender roles within the church.

After this admittedly brief look into the theology of Rahner and Barth, I will delve into the world of social science in order to draw out important and relevant information about the ways in which gender identities are formed in children. Finally, I will offer ideas about childhood and the church’s responsibilities toward young people that can help those who work with children to subvert harmful notions of gender while nurturing theologically and socially appropriate gender identities.

Insights from Theology

The future is built on history. What is to come flows out of what has been. Those who seek to transform the church into a place of liberation and equality do well to explore Christian tradition in order to find those elements that are usable and provide hope for liberation, equality, and human flourishing. Through action-reflection, the church can pursue a commitment to justice and hope that involves shared experiences of the struggle for this commitment, critical analysis of one’s contexts, questions about Christian tradition, and further action, reflection, and celebration. Key to this methodology is the ability to talk back to tradition as we seek out a past that is useful for engaging in acts of liberation. In doing so, one refuses to allow patriarchal and dominating tradition to go unquestioned. One challenges, alters, and discards oppressive elements of a tradition and lifts up those aspects that are emancipatory in forging a future of hope and equality.

Equality in the Theology of Karl Barth

The Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) is often heralded as the most important twentieth-century theologian. His work is seen as a significant theological response to the issues of the first half of the century, including the rise of liberal theology, the World Wars, and capitalist/communist tension.

His thinking, which is often called neo-orthodoxy, centers on the belief that “the object of theology is not the Christian faith, as Schleiermacher and others had made it appear, but the Word of God.”2 Essentially, Barth was responding to theologians who drew their views from revelation in addition to cultural sources like human experience.3 His goal was to ensure that the claims made about God were not founded on culture, but only on the revelation of God—Jesus Christ. He sought to develop a theology from above, that started with and was grounded in God’s revelation.

While at times Barth’s work appears to be a product of his patriarchal culture, there are significant elements of his theological anthropology that form a usable past. At the time of his writing, the German nationalist socialists (Nazis) were rising to power and many theologians had rallied around Hitler and his ideology. Barth’s major concern was countering this movement by basing theology on the word of God rather than the world or experiences of humanity, which were fallible and subject to error. Although gender was not Barth’s main concern, the fact that he devotes a lengthy section of his Church Dogmatics to gender demonstrates that he was interested in the subject, and he offers some insightful thoughts.

Barth reminds us that human sex is real—most human beings exist as either distinctly male or female4—and this reality exists at the concrete human level. In his words, “[A person] cannot wish to liberate [oneself] from the differentiation and exist beyond [one’s] sexual determination as mere [human]; for in everything that is commonly human [one] will always be in fact either the human male or the human female.”5 Furthermore, one’s maleness or femaleness affects all of one’s life.6 Barth recognizes that the distinction between man and woman is very real and has significant implications for one’s life.

Perhaps the most well-known aspect of Barth’s theology of male and female is the order that he ascribes to the sexes through the metaphor of A and B. Man and woman are like the letters A and B. In their essence, “A precedes B, and B follows A.” In a
This, according to Barth, is the divine order of creation. But this divine order, while demonstrating difference, does not imply inequality. In describing the relationship of women and men, he writes, "In inner dignity and right, and therefore in human dignity and right, A has not the slightest advantage over B, nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage. . . . Man and woman are fully equal before God."17

Barth believes that the humanity of men and women comes from the fact that they exist in mutual relationship with one another.8 In his words, "Humanity, the characteristic and essential mode of [humankind’s] being, is in its root fellow-humanity."9 Furthermore, the inherent equality of men and women stems from the fact that they stand in equal relation to God as God’s covenant partners, which also characterizes their relation to each other.10 Thus, the divine order "does not mean any inner inequality between those who stand in this succession and are subject to this order. It does indeed reveal their inequality [they are not the same]. But it does not do so without immediately confirming their equality. . . . It does not confer any privilege or do any injustice."11 Barth knew that this theological view could be used to support the tyranny of men and the passive compliance of women, both of which he sees as acts of disobedience to God.12 He recognizes that, in this way, his words are "very dangerous words,"13 and he warns his readers to avoid using his theological views to wield illegitimate power over the other sex. Yet, as he realized, when read uncritically, his theology can lend itself to such oppression and tyranny.

Another aspect of Barth’s theology that is part of our usable past involves how people are to deal with their sex and how others see their sex. He holds that the very nature of our sex comes from God and, as such, it must not be discounted, ignored, or denied. As previously mentioned, sex is real; "[One] should acknowledge [one’s] sex instead of trying in some way to deny it, that [one] should rejoice in it rather than being ashamed of it."14 That is, at the abstract level, one ought to accept that God has bestowed maleness or femaleness on oneself and should seek to live into one’s biological sex rather than suppressing it. Barth’s theology begins with God’s gift of sex and moves into how human beings should respond and appropriately live into these gifts in relation to one another and to God. However, when it comes to concrete living, the equality of men and women is never perfectly realized, when read uncritically, his theology can lend itself to such oppression and tyranny.

Accepting one’s sex does not mean subscribing to human definitions and typologies of gender. When human beings decide what constitutes differentiations of maleness and femaleness, they presume to know the content of the will of God.15

It is not for us to write the text [of man and woman] itself with the help of any such system. It is not for us to write the text at all. For the texts which we write, the definitions and descriptions of male and female being which we might derive from others or attempt ourselves, do not attain what is meant by the command when it requires of [human beings] that here, too, [they] should accept [their] being as [human], as male or female, as it is seen by God.16

Rather than prescriptive descriptions of what it means to be male or female, Barth acknowledges that such typologies are human "suppositions and assertions which rest upon impressions and personal experiences."17 Thus, he “repudiates the claim that gender roles are rooted in nature and given to the creature”18 and warns that human-formulated typologies become regarded as hard-and-fast imperatives. As Vygotsky would say, they become “fossilized” as inherent ways of being male or female.19 Such typologies are to be demythologized; that is, they should be explored as human systematizations of gender differences that are not inherent to what it means to be female or male.

**Views of Women in the Theology of Karl Rahner**

Karl Rahner (1904–1984) is often regarded as the most prominent Catholic theologian of the last century. This German Jesuit priest ingeniously dealt with both technical theology and matters of day-to-day living.20 Rahner’s work focused on the catholicity (universality) of the church, which refers to the diverse ways in which the church is incarnated across the globe.21 His concern was not with imposing doctrine and rules from the top, but with supporting the many ways that the church is taking shape from the ground up. While Barth did theology from above, Rahner started on the ground and built theology from below. His Catholic theology offers significant insights that extend beyond his tradition and offers wisdom to the wider Christian church. When it comes to his view of women, three points surface as important.

First, he believes that women matter and are equal in rights and dignity to their male counterparts,22 yet he recognizes that the church has failed to live according to this egalitarian view. He writes, “No-one, of course, would contest [the equality of women and men] as a general principle. But the actual principle in the church falls away in many respects from this principle, manifest though it may be.”23 Rahner is not content with abstract talk of equality—his theology from below necessitates that the church take concrete and ongoing steps to promote the equality of women and rid itself of prejudice toward and exploitation of females, for the goal of equality is still a long ways off.24

The work of advocating and moving toward gender equality in the church and in the world is not simply the role of clergy and those in power. Rahner argues that women must engage in this important work for themselves by modeling it and defining what it means to be a woman in the contemporary world. Thus, Rahner seems to advocate for a feminism “from below.” While Barth is focused on providing a coherent theological view, Rahner believes that theology is not simply about answers. In fact, he encourages women to ask questions afresh continually and refuse to accept one’s lot without questioning.25 In a similar way, it can be argued that men should not blindly accept notions of masculinity and manhood, but each should define for himself what it means to be a man. As a friend once said, there are many ways to be masculine and there are many ways to be feminine.

A second important point that surfaces from Rahner’s writing is that context matters. He recognizes that all theology, although it
may be truthful at the abstract level, is historically and culturally conditioned at the level of concrete action. Even these abstract theological conceptions are conditioned by their contexts, for they "always and simply cannot fail to be historically conditioned and dependent on the pre-scientific milieu, on cultural and sociocultural preconception, attitudes, and experiences of life, on the ethos of a society and its life-style." Therefore, theological views of gender involve "a purely human tradition in the church which offers no guarantee of truth even if it has long been undisputed and taken for granted." Since theological suppositions are conditioned by the contexts in which they develop, past views need not be seen as definitive or ideal. The world and the church change, so views of the past cannot provide the norms for contemporary situations. Indeed, discussions about women in the church must continue and be extended from what has been previously supposed and held up as binding. This is precisely what Rahner seeks to do in some of his essays, for one title tells readers that he will be investigating "the position of women in the new situation in which the Church finds herself." Further, Rahner does not confine his theological investigations to abstract theology or official doctrine. He believes that views of gender must be grounded in the experiences and contexts of the everyday lives of real individuals. Theologies of gender are not simply imposed from the top; they are built from the ground up. He advocates for research into the social (anthropological) sciences, for they "say a great deal and much that is important about the distinction of the sexes and, thus, also about the peculiar nature of women." In fact, Rahner nods toward a major shift in theological thinking by suggesting that the social sciences can become conversation partners with theology. Plumbing the depths of theology to investigate gender and sex is insufficient, for it can lead to limited understandings that hinder the emancipation of women. Through information from the social sciences, one can see the ways in which theological views of women are socially and culturally conditioned, which can in turn enhance theology that lends itself to gender equality.

The theology of Rahner and Barth offer a number of key points about gender. Barth, with a theology from above, reminds us that sex is real at a concrete level and influences all areas of one's life, that both sexes are equal before God and relate to each other in a relationship of mutuality, and that, although human beings should acknowledge their sex, they need not conform to human-made interpretations of sex and gender. Rahner, with a theology from below, would agree with Barth in the equality of the sexes, but he recognizes that the church has often failed to live up to standards of equality. His theological insights also remind us that all theology is conditioned by context and that it should be grounded in everyday life. Such grounding can be accomplished through conversations with the social sciences.

Insights from the Social Sciences

Over the years, a common question has surfaced in discussions of human development: nature or nurture? Do human persons cognitively, psychologically, and biologically develop primarily through built-in genetic functions of the human body or through social interactions with culture and other human beings? Is development biological or social? My answer is both. In the past few decades, scholars have challenged stage theories for ignoring the ways in which culture affects development. One such scholar is Barbara Rogoff, who noted that Piaget, in forming his stage theory of cognitive development, was "devoted to examining how the individual makes sense of an unexamined 'generic' world, common to the species as a whole." She posited that children, rather than developing in a biological vacuum, develop through guided participation in cultural habits and norms in apprenticeship-like style with more experienced peers and adults. In her words, "the rapid development of young children into skilled participants in society is accomplished through children's routine, and often tacit, guided participation in ongoing cultural activities as they observe and participate with others in culturally organized activities."

In response to the nature/nurture dichotomy, Rogoff holds that culture and biology are not two parts of a dichotomous pair; rather, they are bound up with one another and are "inseparable aspects of a system within which individuals develop." Human beings are biologically cultural; culture and biology are so intertwined that any separation between them is artificial and false. Rogoff's views of human development are indebted to the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who was more interested in studying processes of human development than products or outcomes. He affirms that children develop within a specific cultural environment, which affects their developmental processes. In his words, "There cannot be a single organically predetermined internal system of activity that exists for each psychological function."

Central to Vygotsky's discussion of human development is the process of signification, whereby external signs become internalized in the human being: "The use of signs leads humans to a specific structure of behavior that breaks away from biological development and creates new forms of a culturally-based psychological process." It allows human beings to control their behavior from without. Eventually, the external sign or gesture becomes internalized in the life of the human person through the act of remembering. Thus, what was once interpersonal becomes an intrapersonal part of the child's system of thinking. As children engage with external signs and "self-generated stimulation," they develop a specific structure of behavior that breaks away from biological development and creates new forms of culturally-based psychological process. As children grow, these external, interpersonal signs become internalized, intrapersonal signs that reconstruct one's psychological functions and behaviors. Eventually, the behavior attached to these intrapersonal signs becomes "fossilized."

Rogoff took up this argument and posited that human development occurs as people participate in sociocultural activities within a community; both the community and one's participation in the community's practices adapt and change.

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Throughout this process. Although she argues that, when it comes to cultural processes and norms, “There is not likely to be One Best Way,” she is aware that many people fail to recognize this. Particularly in middle-class Western cultures, ways of living and engaging with others become routinized, culturally expected, and normalized. As Vygotsky asserted that signs can become “fossilized,” Rogoff posits that cultural habits and processes become institutionalized, and rules and taboos are developed in order to maintain these norms and prevent them from being adapted or dissolved in future generations.

What does all this social science research have to do with gender? In short, it means that gender roles are not biological givens. Ways of being male or female are culturally developed norms for living out one’s sex that become fossilized and institutionalized in human cultures and are passed on from one generation to the next. Thus, ways of being male or female can be adapted.

One way of examining the ways in which people live out their culturally developed gender roles is through the work of Erving Goffman. Human life, according to Goffman, is a show—a presentation or performance that is offered to an audience by individuals or teams of people who cooperate to present themselves in certain ways. Teams control those teammates who would discredit their performance by fostering a high level of in-group solidarity, seeing themselves favorably, and casting other teams in inhuman lights. Contemporary identity theorists have also stressed that such high levels of identification and solidarity can lead not only to the stereotyping of others, but also self-stereotyping. The negative stereotyping of other groups to foster in-group solidarity is seen in children who separate themselves by gender and seek to show that their team is superior or more human; boys may say that girls have cooties, and girls may say that boys aren’t as smart as they are.

Alone or as part of a team, all people project images of themselves, whether performing or observing. Performers project an image to an audience, which projects a reactive image in its response to the performance. Through such performances, individuals and teams develop working agreements about which claims on which issues are going to be honored. A key aspect of performances is the fact that performers can be completely taken in by their own acts; the ways that they present themselves become real to them and to the audience. Thus, performers come to be both those who perform and those who observe their own acts. In this way, social fronts are seen as institutionalized or fossilized, and they begin to take on meaning beyond specific tasks—they become factual “collective representations.” Goffman reminds us that gender is performative—human beings perform their genders for others. As such, gender roles or performances are not fixed realities and can be changed and adapted over time.

This admittedly brief survey of some recent and classic social science research offers many important points to keep in mind about gender. Gender roles are established by culturally developed processes that are formed in children from a very early age—even before one is born. Thus, views of gender roles are always in flux and adapting to sociocultural conditions. Indeed, Rahner sought to examine the roles and views of women in the Catholic Church in light of recent changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council; he knew that culture shifts and, as such, past views of women and men should not be pushed on contemporary individuals.

Second, gender roles are performative. Human beings project themselves in certain socially constructed manners, even though most of the time this happens at the level of semi- or unconscious awareness. These performances take place in subtle interaction between people within their social and cultural contexts. Yet, they do not necessarily describe people for who they truly are; rather, they are socially constructed projections performed for those around them.

Finally, gender roles are not factual givens that are inherently and biologically built into each person. Gender roles are socially and culturally created ways of being biologically male or female. Thus, being female or male does not mean that one must conform to a standard or mold that is said to be universal to all males or females. Cultural notions of how one should live into one’s God-given sex need not determine who one is as male or female. Although we need to recognize our sex, we do not need to conform to the ways in which society defines our gender, especially when it results in oppression. Barth acknowledges portions of these latter two points, for he is aware that, while men and women should embrace their God-ordained sex, they do not necessarily need to ascribe to socially constructed typologies of what it means to be male or female. Thus, there is no divine mandate for people to perform and conform to norms of maleness and femaleness that are ascribed by human culture. With these points in mind, we are ready to explore some ways in which Christian ministry can correct harmful and oppressive gender-role stereotypes while nurturing children in environments that allow them to explore what it means to be female or male.

Correcting Gender Stereotypes

In her research into the religious lives of adolescent girls, Joyce Mercer found that faith communities are vital to the lives of girls and are powerful forces in shaping their understandings of what it means to be female. I am sure that young boys are equally influenced by their faith communities. Yet, churches are not always positive influences; they can liberate young people from gender stereotypes or oppress them. Most do both to some degree or another. In either case, however, Mercer makes it clear that religion informs gender. We who are a part of faith communities are called to embrace the responsibility of shaping the gender identities of young people.

Teaching for Equality

Ministry with children is inherently a ministry of teaching (as, to some level, are all church ministries). Churches offer young people explicit lessons through Sunday school, sermons, and other teaching times, as well as implicit lessons through their language, behavior, and practices. Gender equality can be promoted through both types of lessons.
Bible stories are often a staple of lesson material and curricula for children. They can impart values and raise questions that aid in moral and spiritual development. Yet, they also impart information about gender and religion. Many of the key players in the Bible are men—Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Paul. But there are significant women in the Christian Scriptures from whom we also have much to learn. Focusing exclusively on the stories of men in the Bible can lead to patriarchal assumptions that God chooses men over women and that men are more useful to God, but adding the stories of strong and risk-taking women in the Bible demonstrates that God does indeed love and call all people, regardless of gender. When stories in the Bible are told from the perspectives of women (who are often marginalized), new perspectives and insights are uncovered that offer new ways of seeing God and the world. Furthermore, how one presents Christ to children can affect the ways in which they come to see him as the gendered Incarnation of God. By referring to Christ solely through patriarchal and masculine terms, like Lord, King, and Son of God, one emphasizes the maleness of his work and person. But, Christ is also the Redeemer, Liberator, Child of God, and Prophet, all of which roles and titles are not attributed to his maleness.

There are many ways that churches and those who work with children offer implicit messages and lessons about what it means to be male or female, from having an all-male pastoral staff and an all-female Sunday school team, to the language used to speak of God, humanity, and the world, to styles of preaching and teaching, and the way the Bible is read and interpreted. Since the language used in the church has a hand in shaping gender identities, it is vital that faith communities ensure that the language that they use, especially around children, does not encourage patriarchy, but promotes the equality of the sexes.

Creating a Community of Child-hood

Human beings are created for community; we are inherently social creatures. It makes sense, therefore, that one of most significant ways to correct gender stereotypes in ministries with children is through forming communities of young people and adult mentors in which children are accepted, supported, and given freedom to explore what it means to be a girl or boy. Rather than defining such communities by gender, like sisterhood or brotherhood, I recommend we define such relationships by age—communities of child-hood. A number of elements are central to this idea.

First, such communities are places of radical hospitality, where caring adults show children love, acceptance, and support. All people—especially children—need to belong to communities and groups in which they can grow and be accepted unconditionally for who they are as worthwhile human beings created in the image of God. Rather than seeing them as commodities, as do some Christians, children should be accepted as subjects and whole persons. Through hospitable child-hood, children can also engage in mutual relationships with one another and with caring adult mentors, which Barth believes is a central aspect of what it means to be human.

The role of mentors in child-hood is vital to the success of such communities. It is important for these adults to have their own consciousness raised in order to bring to light the ways gender roles and stereotypes are at work in their lives. In doing so, they can understand what it means to be male or female and can model diverse ways that human beings live out (or perhaps live into) their biological sex. Rahner believes this is necessary for working toward gender equality. Children can see and know women and men who are both strong and sensitive, and they can realize that there are many ways of being a boy or girl. Many of the teenage girls involved in Mercer's research have been empowered to challenge oppressive gender assumptions by seeing women's empowerment modeled in their faith communities. Rogoff reminds us that children learn by watching and engaging with those around them. Adults who are comfortable with their gender, who take Barth's advice and do not ignore or deny their sex, can model to children that God loves variety in the way that people live into their sex.

In Girltalk, Godtalk, Mercer argues that churches that focus on having a personal faith with God without taking communal aspects of faith into account are more apt to lead to gender inequality, for the church's and tradition's assumptions about gender are seen as definitive for one's life. Conversely, faith that is communal and social (like that fostered in child-hood) empowers young people to examine collectively assumptions about gender in order to de-mythologize them (as Barth encourages) and challenge one another to examine continually the ways social forces impress themselves upon young people. A principal way for young people to engage in such critical reflection is through discussion and conversation with adults and with other children in which they are given the opportunities to tell their stories. As storied people, human beings are significantly shaped by the stories they tell about themselves, others, and the world around them. Through conversation in child-hood communities, young people can share their stories and reflect together on what it means to be a male and female in light of these stories. Through this type of discussion, one can continually question social definitions and assumptions about gender that are impressed upon young people, which Rahner believes all people should be free to do.

Conclusion

In our world of materialism and consumption, children are often seen as consumers. They not only consume products and material commodities, but also consume culture. While it may be true that children take in and are affected by culture (they consume it), this is only half true. As they consume culture, children in turn participate in shaping culture. Children are not passive recipients of sociocultural norms. Rogoff holds that “Children are active participants in understanding their world, building on both genetic and sociocultural constraints and resources.” Culture is dynamic and is always open to change; children indeed can bring about such change. By being aware of theological and sociocultural views of gender and gender construction, by appropriately subverting harmful stereotypes and roles through
ministry with children, and through creating child-hood communities where children are accepted and supported, where they see adults model what it means to be female or male, and where they engage in meaningful conversation with mentors and one another, we can help to ensure that each child’s future is one of equality.

Notes

1. In this article, I will be drawing from Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” in The Social Construction of Gender, ed. Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991), 13–17. In my use of the words sex and gender, sex refers to the biological categories of male or female, and gender speaks of the ways in which one lives out one’s biological sex.


5. Barth, “Man and Woman,” 118.


23. Rahner “Position of Woman,” 82.


34. Rahner, “Mary,” 216.


36. Rogoff, Apprenticeship, 16.

37. Rogoff, Apprenticeship, 28.


39. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 64.

40. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 55.

41. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 40.

42. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 45.

43. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 56.

44. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 40.

45. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 63.


47. Rogoff, Cultural Nature, 368.


50. Goffman, Presentation of Self, 191, 214.


52. Goffman, Presentation of Self, 9.

53. Goffman, Presentation of Self, 9–10.

54. Goffman, Presentation of Self, 17.70.

55. Goffman, Presentation of Self, 80.

56. Goffman, Presentation of Self, 26.


58. Mercer, Girltalk, 130.

59. Mercer, Girltalk, xxiii.

60. In his popular book, Faith Begins at Home, Mark Holmen states in the introduction that children are “our most precious commodity”; (Ventura: Regal, 2005), 11.


64. Mercer, Girltalk, 65.

65. Mercer, Girltalk, 2.


68. Rogoff, Apprenticeship, 37.
ETS Coffee Hour for Women Scholars

If you’re a woman and attending the Evangelical Theological Society’s annual meeting, we’d love to see you at the Women’s Coffee Hour.

Join other women scholars for coffee, fellowship, and networking.

Where: Rhode Island Convention Center, Room 551B
When: Thursday, November 16, 9:15–10:30 p.m.
Where and how we start in our interpretation of Scripture determines where we will end up. When seeking to understand the relevance of the Bible's teaching for our lives, interpretive starting points are particularly significant. The method by which we read and derive meaning from Scripture is the fundamental determinant of the nature of the meaning we will derive.

Nevertheless, we can make several affirmations about the Bible and its meaning. First, we can affirm that Scripture holds relevance and truth for our lives and our Christian faith, because we believe that Scripture is the word of God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God speaks through Scripture in ways that transcend our best academic and scientific analysis of the Bible. Secondly, we can affirm that we possess clear and helpful methods and resources for understanding and applying Scripture to our lives. As we gain deeper insight into the historical, literary, and social settings of the Bible, we encounter fresh and deeper understandings of its meaning for our lives.

These two affirmations—that the Bible is the word of God and that we have tools to interpret Scripture—enable us to assert that Scripture contains accessible and applicable truth.

In light of Ephesians 5:21–33 and its teachings regarding the Christian community, women, and marriage, let us examine the methods and resources for interpretation. This passage says:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (NIV 1984)

**Cultural Translation**

Most Christians are familiar with the task of cultural translation while interpreting Scripture. We recognize that the Bible was written in a different context than our own and seek to understand its relevance for our lives. When interpreting and appropriating the book of Ephesians, therefore, we naturally and necessarily engage in cultural translation. For example, the admonitions concerning slaves in Ephesians 6 are properly and almost universally acknowledged to be nontransferable to our present context in the Western world. We readily reject the institution of slavery as evil, and do not hesitate to avoid the direct application of the command “Slaves, obey your earthly masters.” As we do, we are interpreting the commands of Scripture in light of our present social, political, and theological contexts.

The location from which we begin our interpretation of Ephesians 6—for example, in the case of twenty-first-century North Americans living after the civil rights movement, in a democratic country and globalized world— influences how we apply this passage to our lives. Although a seemingly elementary affirmation, the previous statement holds great significance for our interpretation of Ephesians’s teaching on women.

Interestingly, the modes of interpretation and cultural translation used by Christians are often inconsistent when approaching Ephesians’s commands regarding slaves and women. While few Christians interpret Ephesians as a justification for slavery, many hold to a supposedly “direct” application of its commands concerning women in chapter 5. Paul’s exhortation “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord” is interpreted and applied literally as supporting male dominance in the church and home. This common inconsistency between readings of Ephesians’s commands regarding slaves and women indicates that many Christians possess preconceived and extraneous assumptions about the roles of women, which they bring to their interpretation of the text.

Those who hold that Ephesians 5:21–33 supports the authority of husbands over their wives start their interpretation of this passage with preconceived beliefs in gender inequality and patriarchy. When such preconceived beliefs and interpretations are brought to the passage, the cultural context of the first century is abandoned and the thrust of the message is missed. Fair interpretation necessitates that, in the same spirit by which we evaluate Ephesians’s teaching regarding slaves, we acknowledge how the cultural and social norms regarding women in the first century underlie the author’s instructions regarding women and marriage. Starting with a solid understanding of the social and historical context is essential to arriving at a balanced and thoughtful interpretation of the Bible.

**The Historical, Social Context of Ephesians**

During the first century, when Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, the social and cultural context was significantly different. Wives were commonly twelve to fifteen years younger
and far less educated than their husbands. Furthermore, women in Greek culture during the first century were considered largely property of their fathers and husbands. The predominant cultural assumption regarding women at this time was patriarchy and inequality.

Gordon Fee, in his 2002 article, offers a helpful description of the Greco-Roman household of Paul’s day. According to Fee, the household was a place of production, run by a man, wherein slaves, women, and children existed in hierarchal relationships that benefitted the male-dominated household business. Marriage was not based on love, but existed for the purposes of bearing children and maintaining the household structure. Men and women were not considered equals and did not exist in loving marriage relationships as we understand them. Thus, Paul’s words to the Ephesians, especially those concerning household relationships, address a particular context and culture quite foreign to our own—so much so that great care must be taken when seeking to apply his instructions to our present circumstances.

In Ephesians 5, Paul takes the normative social structures of his day for granted. He addresses the relationship between husbands and wives in a descriptive manner that would have made sense to his original readers. Thus, Ephesians does not provide prescriptive guidelines for marriage. As Philip Payne has stated, “While Paul’s wording was framed in order to speak to people in his own social structure, one must not assume that he intended to make those social structures normative for all societies.”

The difference between the context in which the text was written and our present context necessitates that we thoughtfully and creatively reimagine how we might follow the principles and commands of this passage. Thus, the interpretive task for us as Christians in the twenty-first century is to understand and determine what Paul was telling the Christians in first-century Ephesus, why his message was significant at that time, and how we might appropriate the meaning of his commands in our own lives. We ought, as I. Howard Marshall describes, to engage in “continuing evaluation of society in light of the gospel.”

**Metaphorical Language in Ephesians 5:21–33**

In verse 23 of Ephesians 5, Paul utilizes a metaphor and a simile when he states, “For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” The relationship between Christ and the church is presented as analogous to the relationship of husbands to their wives. Paul makes further use of simile when, in verse 25, he charges husbands to “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” and in verse 28 states, “[H]usbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.” The relationship between Christ and the church and the relationship between husbands and wives are similar insofar as they relate analogically, but they are not identical.

Ephesians 5:21–33, as is common throughout Scripture and literature, utilizes the literary mechanism of analogy as a tool for conveying meaning. A simile is a figure of speech using *like* or *as* (a metaphor omits these) in which a comparison is made between two unlike things which, in fact, have something in common. The comparison relates two unfamiliar things in a manner that presents them as substitutes for one another.

There is not a one-to-one, unequivocal relationship between things joined in metaphors and similes, because such figures of speech highlight the points of connection or similarity between two unlike things. When two things are related through metaphors and similes, they necessarily possess both points of similarity and points of difference. A simile ceases to function as a simile if the two things being related are viewed either as completely identical or utterly different. This is particularly important to remember when seeking to interpret and apply scriptural similes.

In order to be understood, similes and metaphors require imagination. In fact, I offer that humans’ ability to create and understand metaphor is our highest form of cognitive capacity—an ability that sets us apart from all other species. Further confirmation of this idea is evidenced in an analogy’s ability to advance empathy, an intellectual identification with the feelings, thoughts, and actions of another. Empathy flows from an understanding of similarity and unity. When we acknowledge the full humanity of others, we participate in a comparative exercise of empathically recognizing the similarity between our lives and those of others.

I suggest, therefore, that understanding comparative figures of speech is centrally important to the Christian gospel and mission. We cannot love our neighbors unless we acknowledge our common origin as children of God. Furthermore, the message of Christ is dependent upon a plethora of analogical constructions, and the gospel can only be advanced through the utilization and comprehension of these comparisons. Examining biblical metaphors and similes and applying their significance to our own lives demands that we creatively engage with their historical and literary foundations and imagine how they might be translated into our own context.

Metaphors and similes are not timeless, but, rather, reflect the unique context of their creator. They have cultural and historical limits, and the original, authorially intended points of similarity and points of difference are frozen in a particular social and historical thought world—one that must be penetrated and understood if the full sense is to be comprehended.

At the same time, metaphors and similes are rich and living. They can, and do, take on new and additional meanings over time. As their meanings change and develop, they demand continual engagement and exploration in order to be understood. Often, over time, the meaning conveyed through a figure of speech might be more accurately expressed through a different referent. The task of Christian theology and the church is, thus, to engage the metaphors and similes of Christianity and its Scriptures in order to see new and pertinent meaning in them.

**Reading Ephesians in Light of the Gospel**

The book of Ephesians and its teaching on wives and husbands must likewise be read with attention to the gospel message and
the circumstances surrounding its authorship. In “Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage,” I. Howard Marshall states, “Paul’s teaching remains authoritative for today, but is authoritative, just as he himself would insist, as an expression of the gospel.” The teachings of Jesus and the redemptive history of God’s work must serve as the lens through which we interpret Scripture, particularly those sections, like Ephesians, that address early church communities in specific contexts.

In particular, we must examine the gospel’s teachings on relationships, and study how Jesus’ ministry addressed social relationships at the time in which the New Testament was written. The Christian faith offers us a fundamental understanding of what it means to be human—what it means to be created in the image of God and exist in relationship with God and other humans. Thus, at stake in every discussion about gender identities and roles within the church and home is theological anthropology. More than seeking to locate and name the fundamental differences between men and women, our task in interpreting Scripture should be to understand what it means to be humans, male and female, together, created in the image of God.

An accurate reading and explication of Ephesians 5:18—6:9 can occur only with attention to the entirety of Paul’s message in this letter. This section is located within a larger passage that addresses Christian relationships and living. Paul’s concern here is that followers of Christ live lives of holiness—lives characterized by righteousness and newness of life. Becoming a Christian means that one’s understanding of oneself, and, consequently, one’s actions, are changed. Christians are “to be made new” (4:23) and to “put off” (4:22) the corruption and sin of their former, unbelieving lives. Truthfulness, peace, respect, reconciliation, encouragement, compassion, love, and forgiveness are to characterize all followers of Christ, because they reflect Christ himself.

Paul’s words concerning wives and husbands in Ephesians occur within this understanding that the lives of Christians are to reflect unique moral standards characterized by holiness. Here, Paul addresses three relationships: wives and husbands, slaves and masters, and children and fathers. Gordon Fee notes that these three relationships were primary to the Greco-Roman household of the first century and that addressing these relationships would have been common practice.

Many scholars, including Gordon Fee and I. Howard Marshall, suggest that the interpretive key to Paul’s writing on Christian holiness in these three relationships is found in the command in 5:18, to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, the holiness and newness of life to which Paul is calling the church can only be realized through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This passage continues by describing what Spirit-filled lives look like. The Holy Spirit’s power enables Christians to “[b]e completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (4:2), acknowledge that “[w]e are all members of one body” (4:25), “[b]e kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other” (4:32), “[l]ive a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (5:1). Finally, and most significantly for our discussion, the Holy Spirit enables Christians to “[s]ubmit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). Submission is, therefore, presented here as a characteristic of our new humanity in Christ, not merely a feminine ideal.

This passage is teaching all Christians to submit to one another in love and humility—an idea which, at that time, would have transformed the normative understanding of social relationships. The hierarchical social structures of the period in which this letter was written would have been incompatible with the social ethic Paul was presenting to the church in Ephesians. Rather than prescribing patriarchal relationships within marriage, Paul was challenging the patriarchy of his day by calling the whole church—men, women, slaves, and free—to be filled with the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit and so to submit to one another.

Paul’s commands about marriage in this passage are given for the purpose of explaining Christians’ “new life in Christ.” The submission to which Paul was calling the church was a submission of equals. His use of the reciprocal pronoun allēlois in Greek to form the construction “Submit to one another” in 5:21 indicates action that is free and collective. Thus, Paul’s use of this construction is incompatible with a patriarchal interpretation of his later commands concerning marriage. Read in view of this authorial intention, as well as the historical circumstances of his day, Paul’s teaching on women and marriage in Ephesians cannot be interpreted so as to justify the subordination of women.

The command for wives to submit to their husbands is directly dependent upon the command for everyone within the Christian community to submit to each other. “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands” cannot properly be interpreted and applied apart from the preceding and prerequisite command, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

The “Head” Metaphor in Ephesians 5:21—33

Ephesians 5:21—33 offers, by way of analogy and metaphor, examples of how the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, through the salvation of Jesus Christ, might transform relationships within the Christian community. One of the most well-known and misunderstood metaphors (followed by a simile) for marriage in the New Testament is found in this passage when Paul says, “For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.” This metaphor invites readers to imagine and interpret the relationship between head and body in order to understand more fully how new life in the Holy Spirit transforms marriage. Like all metaphors, head, as Paul uses it, is rich and living. Its proper interpretation demands care and understanding.

Paul’s assertion that husbands are the heads of their wives is commonly interpreted by some Christians in a hierarchical manner, meaning ruler or authority. The original Greek text of Ephesians, however, does not allow for such an ordered
interpretation. In this passage, the limits of the English language blur important distinctions among several meanings of the term translated head in English. Rather than indicating hierarchy and therefore wives’ submission to their husbands, the Greek word kephalē in this context is properly understood to convey the ideas of dependence and unity and can be translated source.8 It was commonly used in Paul’s day as a military term to describe one who went into battle before the rest of the troops.10 Thus, it indicated chronology rather than leadership or position of authority. Kephalē indicates those who willingly sacrifice and lay down their lives. Such understanding is consistent with Paul’s metaphorical assertion that Christ is the kephalē of the church.

Another Greek word, archē, was used in Paul’s time to convey the hierarchical ideas of leader or ruler, as well as point of origin and beginning.11 Had Paul used this word, Ephesians’ teaching on marriage would be more justifiably hierarchal. However, as constructed, the metaphor of head does not indicate subordination. It is significant that Paul chose the word kephalē to describe the relationship between husband and wife in the Christian community because the wider Greek culture of Paul’s time would have expected the use of the word archē in a description of the marriage relationship.

In saying that the husband is the head or kephalē of the wife, Paul is speaking to the chronology of creation history and his own historical situation rather than hierarchy within the marriage relationship. The instruction for husbands to be the head of their wives is an application of Genesis 2:24, which says that husband and wife are to form one flesh. Man and woman were created for a unified life with each other. Therefore, Paul’s metaphor in Ephesians implies mutual dependence rather than hierarchy in marriage. In this metaphor, the head and the body, which make up the one flesh of marriage, cannot survive apart from or over and against one another. In keeping with the thematic thrust of this passage, Paul states that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, husbands are to be the head of their wives by existing as one part of a unified and mutually dependent flesh.

Christ as the Head of the Church

In order to understand more fully Paul’s head metaphor in Ephesians, we must examine the relationship of Christ and the church to which the marriage relationship is likened. As already noted, analogical language, by its nature, highlights the similarity between two unlike things. Christ and the church are categorically different than man and woman. As the church’s foundation and Savior, Jesus in his relationship to the church can never be identically mirrored in the marriage relationship. The simile of the relationships of Christ and the church and husbands and wives would cease to be analogous if there were not significant differences between them.

However, in the church today, the distinction and differences between the Christ/church, husband/wife simile are often lost or denied. When this occurs, the idea of mutuality within marriage is lost, and husbands are often made out to be the “saviors” or “spiritual leaders” of their wives. Such an understanding denies women a fully free relationship with God.

That being noted, the points of similarity between these two relationships will be our focus. The point of commonality is found in the Greek word kephalē and its meaning of “source.” Paul is saying that, just as Christ is the source of the church, so too the husband became the source of his wife’s existence when God used Adam’s rib to create Eve in Genesis.

With this simile, Paul was also seeking to highlight the unity and mutuality with which husbands and wives are to live. Christ and the church exist in a reciprocal and unified relationship. The church is dependent upon Christ for its wellbeing and life, and the church does Christ’s work on earth. Likewise, husbands and wives are to be unified and reciprocally loving toward one another. Therefore, the analogy between the relationships of Christ and the church and husbands and wives is found in the idea of source and unity, rather than the commonly interpreted idea of hierarchy.

Love Your Wife as Christ Loved the Church

Paul’s admonition for wives to submit to their husbands is paralleled in this passage in another analogical construction when Paul says in 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” This command further expounds Paul’s understanding of Christian marriage and two lives filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. The injunctions in this passage that “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies,” and “each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself,” powerfully emphasize the love and service husbands are to extend in relationship with their wives.

For Paul, the “headship” husbands are to have over their wives is exercised by loving their wives (5:25, 28, 33), cleansing them through the word (5:26–27), nourishing them (5:25, 28, 33), and cherishing them (5:29). I. Howard Marshall notes, “Not only is this instruction to husbands to love their wives unusual and unconventional in the world of the New Testament, but the sheer intensity of the love demanded is extraordinary.”12 This idea of “headship” would have been strange in the Greco-Roman household, but is consistent with Paul’s teaching on new life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This interpretation of Ephesians is also congruent with Jesus’ life and teaching. The gospel offers a transformative ethic of authority, power, and relationships: “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 10:43–44). Likewise, the Beatitudes of
Matthew 5 present meekness, mercy, and peacemaking as values of the kingdom of God.

In Ephesians, Paul takes up and illuminates via metaphor and simile how these teachings of Christ are exemplified within marriage. Far from condoning hierarchy within marriage, he calls Christians to a new level of mutuality, love, and service in all of their relationships and, particularly, in their marriage relationships. His teaching is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and reflects a new understanding of the Spirit’s transformative and powerful presence in the lives of Christians.

Notes

9. See, for example, Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Toward an Understanding of Ancient Conceptions of ‘Head,’” Priscilla Papers 20, no. 3 (Summer 2006), 4–8.
Excerpts from The Feminist Bogeywoman
Rebecca Merrill Groothuis

Editor’s note: Below are excerpts from the booklet, The Feminist Bogeywoman, written by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and published in 1995 by Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group. It is used here by permission. Please note that it is not the same as ch. 8 of Groothuis’s 1997 book Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War between Traditionalism and Feminism (Baker, Wipf and Stock), which bears the same title. For more about the author, see Douglas Groothuis, “Rebecca Merrill Groothuis’s Contribution to Biblical Equality: A Personal Testimony and Lament,” Priscilla Papers 29, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 3-6.

Rebecca’s husband Doug, Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary, offers the following introduction: “Rebecca Merrill Groothuis was one of the most articulate and ardent defenders of biblical equality from 1994 until dementia ended her writing about ten years ago. The Feminist Bogeywoman is written in a question-answer format. I offer excerpts from this taut and shrewd booklet for a new generation of those who believe that women and men are equally called by God for all aspects of Christian service and cultural involvement. The same issues swirl about today as when she wrote it nearly a quarter century ago.”

Q: Isn’t evangelical feminism simply the product of an antibiblical, contemporary ideology that has infiltrated the church?

A: This question has become a central point of contention in the evangelical debate over women’s “place” in the home and the church. Although traditionalists focus primarily on certain biblical prooftexts to make their case for unequal gender roles, their argument really begins with a set of assumptions about feminism and modern culture. The prooftexts are then interpreted and applied in light of these assumptions. The traditionalist argument goes like this: Any deviation from “traditional” gender roles is “feminist,” and anything feminist is entirely a product of modern culture. Because modern culture stands in total opposition to biblical values, any interpretation of the Bible that questions the “traditional” roles could only arise, not out of a genuine respect for the authority of Scripture, but out of a desire to use the Bible to justify an agenda that the church has imported from modern culture.

This particular view of how “feminism” relates to culture and Christianity is, in large part, what fuels the emotional firestorm that can so easily be ignited whenever evangelical Christians discuss this issue. Yet such assumptions should not go unquestioned. Is evangelical feminism a first step onto a slippery slope that will soon have us sliding swiftly into the blasphemous excesses of radical feminism? Or is it on a different road altogether, one that derives from a different source and aspires to a different goal, with a fundamentally different motivation?

Anxiety about where evangelical feminism is really coming from, and where it is really going, has created widespread misunderstanding about what exactly is at stake in the debate between evangelical feminists and traditionalists. This misunderstanding has itself become an element of the conflict, and has served only to heighten the hostilities. What is at stake is the opportunity for women to pursue their callings, whatever they may be, as well as the opportunity for both men and women to benefit from the full range of women’s gifts and to learn from and relate to women as whole persons. What is not at stake is biblical authority, biblical morality, the integrity of the church, or the preservation of the family and civilized society.

It is crucial that we understand what evangelical feminism is and what it is not, and how its premises, goals, motivation, and historical roots differentiate it from other varieties of feminism. Otherwise, it will remain impossible for the ideas at issue to be evaluated fairly and discussed civilly. In other words, we need to level the playing field before anyone tries to win the game.

Q: If those who advocate biblical equality aren’t just imitating modern culture, then in what ways does evangelical feminism differ from modern secular feminism?

A: Evangelical feminism has a different beginning and a different end. It arises from a different theology and a different history, and it aspires to a different purpose. Theologically, evangelical feminism is based on the biblical principle of the equality of all people before God. Other forms of contemporary feminism are generally based on the experience or consciousness of women; there is no higher authority. The difference, then, is between locating the source of authority in biblical revelation and locating it in a human-centered (or woman-centered) moral relativism.

Historically, the roots of evangelical feminism can be found in the goals and values of the nineteenth-century women’s movement, which arose from an interaction of the political ideals of classical liberalism (equality under the law for all) with the religious zeal of the Second Great Awakening and, later, the Third Awakening (or Holiness Movement). The strong evangelical element in the movement for women’s rights gave birth to an army of evangelical women who were serving as pastors, teachers, social reformers, and missionaries by the end of the century.

Although it is commonly assumed today that evangelical feminism is simply an offshoot of the modern feminist movement that began in the 1960s, quite the opposite was true in the nineteenth century. Early American feminism was driven in large part by the reformist idealism that arose from the evangelical awakenings during that period. . . .

Because evangelical feminism is grounded in a biblical worldview, its purpose is quite different from the many varieties of modern feminism based on radical individualism. One important difference is between the desire to serve and the desire for power. Evangelical feminists desire that men and women be allowed to serve God according to their own unique gifts rather.
than according to culturally predetermined personality slots called “Christian manhood” and “Christian womanhood.” Their ultimate goal is the good of the church and society rather than simply the empowerment of the individual woman.

On the other hand, mainstream secular feminists seek to acquire the same level of social power that men have, and the extremely radical feminists want to develop female power that is distinct from and superior to male power. Either way, the central motivation of most modern feminists appears to be the desire for power. And their primary goal is the fulfillment of the individual woman. There is occasionally some talk of improving society by having more women in positions of power, but that seems to be a secondary concern.

Another important difference is that modern feminists tend to think that women can win their equal rights and self-fulfillment without any help from men. In evangelical feminism, in contrast, the biblical principle of mutual submission leads to an emphasis on community rather than individualism. Biblical equality can only come about through the cooperation of both men and women. This is especially true in marriage. Contrary to the tenets of secular feminism, marital equality requires more than the wife becoming more assertive and independent; it requires that each partner exercise a self-giving, submissive love toward the other.

Q: What are some of the reasons for the traditionalist fear of evangelical feminism?

A: Generally speaking, people often fear change and resist anything that might “upset the apple cart.” Some women fear feminism because they have the idea that it leads to divorce and/or to mothers neglecting their children. Men who identify masculinity with having authority over women fear the loss of their sense of manhood; and men who are simply afraid of women for whatever reasons fear losing control of the situation.

I think the fear that really drives the traditionalist backlash against all types of feminism is the fear of the slippery slope. Many evangelicals are unwilling even to consider any idea labeled “feminist” for fear they will find themselves sliding swiftly into all manner of radical, pagan feminist apostasy. Where does this fear come from?

The current constellation of cultural warriors in secular society has the antifeminists in the conservative, traditionalist camp and the feminists in the liberal, anti-Christian camp; thus, it is assumed that a traditional view of morality can only lead to an antifeminist view of gender roles, and that any view that accords women more equality than they are allowed by today’s traditionalists can only derive from a loose or relativistic view of morality that denies the binding authority of the Bible.

As a result, evangelical feminism is viewed as a package deal; that is, it cannot be purchased separately, but with it comes all the baggage associated with a culturally relative vision of morality. This explains why so many traditionalists are convinced that evangelical feminism’s certain and ultimate outcome is the destruction of the family and society.

I have often wondered how mutual submission and shared authority in the home could destroy the family and society. Yet it seems that when traditionalists look at a married couple who submit to one another and make decisions together as equal partners, they see a slippery slope at the foot of which is the breakdown of all moral authority and social order. Why? Because traditionalists believe that equalitarian marriage can derive only from a humanistic, relativistic, and thoroughly unbiblical view of morality. And once the door to moral relativism has been opened wide enough to let in equalitarian marriage, then it is only a matter of time before all the other evils come bursting through and consume us all.

James Davison Hunter remarks that in the culture wars at large there is no common moral ground. The combatants on each side stand on irreconcilably different moral territories, and hence can only shout past each other. However, it seems to me that in the evangelical church, people are shouting past each other, not because they stand on irreconcilably different moral territories, but because it is the conviction of the traditionalists that this is the case.

The branding of evangelical feminism as secular and ultimately heretical stifles discussion and fosters fear among evangelicals. As a result, an idea that is debatable on biblical grounds tends to be dismissed before it is even fairly examined. And the question that goes begging is whether evangelical feminism is in fact on a slippery slope. Does it have within it the beginning of blatant and blasphemous error? Is it, in both essence and premise, identical with modern secular feminism? If the answer is “no,” as I believe it is, then the errors of radical/pagan feminism cannot legitimately be invoked to discredit evangelical feminism.

Antifeminists frequently refer to those individuals who have moved from biblical feminism to radical or pagan feminism as “evidence” for the inevitability of this direction of movement. Yet there is a greater number of traditionalists who have become evangelical feminists: in fact, most evangelical feminists were once traditionalists. That does not mean that traditionalism leads to evangelical feminism, however. Simply because someone moves from Position A to Position B does not prove that Position A caused Position B. People can change their minds for a variety of reasons.

Q: What is the biblical basis for equality between women and men?

A: Biblical equality means that it is biblically illegitimate to limit a person’s identity, status, vocation, or ministry opportunities solely on the basis of that person’s gender; it does not mean that gender makes no difference at all in a person’s identity or behavior. Because God shows no favoritism, but regards each person as a unique individual, we ought not presume to do otherwise.

The truth of the equality of all persons under God is grounded in creation. Genesis 1:26-28 and 5:1-2 state that both male and female humans bear God’s image and without distinction; both have been commanded equally and without distinction to take dominion, not one over the other, but both together over the rest of God’s creation for the glory of the Creator. The essential equality of all people is fundamental to the message of Jesus Christ, who insisted that the concern of his disciples be the
exercise of submission and servanthood, rather than the effort to claim or attain status and authority (Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27). The truth of biblical equality is the basis of God's offer of salvation to all, as indicated in Acts 10:34 and Romans 2:11, which state that God shows no favoritism for one group of people over another. It is a characteristic of the new covenant, in which believers without respect to age, gender, or social status may be filled with the Holy Spirit and be gifted in prophetic ministry (Acts 2:17-18).

Biblical equality is a consequence of God's act of salvation in the new covenant, as indicated in Galatians 3:26-28, which states that we are all "sons," or heirs, in Christ, and that there is no longer any distinction in spiritual privilege or prerogative between Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. First Peter 3:7 also states that husband and wife are equal heirs of God's gift of life. Equality is reflected in the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6), and in repeated New Testament exhortations to believers to honor one another and to be humble and submissive toward one another (Matt. 23:8-12; Rom. 12:3, 10; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3). The principles of equal respect and mutual submission are woven throughout the fabric of the Bible, especially the New Testament.

The biblical truth of women's equality with men is not a "new" idea imported to the church from secular culture; it is rooted in the first chapter of the Bible. As Genesis 3:16 indicates, however, the entrance of sin into God's created order destroyed the equality and mutuality of the relationship between woman and man; cultural patriarchy was the result. God revealed himself and his plan for his people by means of patriarchal cultures, but God progressively made known his redemptive plan whereby the essential equality of all people would be restored and the practice of male rule brought to an end.

This ethic of biblical equality was evident in Jesus' treatment of women as persons in their own right. It was also evident in the actions of Paul and the early Christians who sanctioned the service of those women who had been called by God to pastoral and teaching ministries. Because of the existing customs of the surrounding patriarchal cultures . . . the approach of the New Testament church was to tolerate the cultural subordination of slaves and women, and yet to modify and moderate these customs, and ultimately to point beyond them to God's original intention for human relations.

Today, however, when non-Christians are not offended by an equalitarian gospel but are offended by a hierarchical gospel, we have no reason to perpetuate the cultural practices that were initially intended for Christians living in patriarchal societies.

Q: What do you do about those Bible verses that seem to teach the subordination of women to male authority?
A: First, I seek to understand individual Bible verses in light of the overall biblical principle of the essential equality of all human beings regardless of their gender, race, or class. Any biblical texts that seem to contradict this fundamental biblical truth need to be scrutinized carefully, in order to determine their true meaning within the context of the cultural situations for which they were originally intended.

Second, I am aware that many of the passages employed to teach the universal subordination of women are not as clear-cut and straightforward as traditionally assumed. First Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in particular are riddled with translational and hermeneutical ambiguities. Unless these texts can be shown unequivocally to be teaching what they traditionally have been understood to be teaching, however, the hierarchalist view is on bibliically shaky ground.

The entire case for excluding women from church leadership and teaching positions rests on 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Without this text serving as a direct statement of a universal, transcultural principle of a male hierarchy within the body of Christ, there is no biblical case for restricting upper-level ministries to men. If this is not the only way legitimately to understand Paul's intent in writing this text, then the case for male rule is a wobbly one. And unless 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 can definitively be said to be setting forth a chain of command, a cosmic hierarchy of authority involving not merely man and woman but God and Christ as well, then the entire passage must be seen simply as a series of arguments Paul employed to persuade female believers in Corinith to wear a head covering during public worship.

Third, the more I study this bibliically, the more aware I become of the missing pieces and weak links in the traditionalist biblical picture. In order to build a complete and consistent doctrine of the universal and God-ordained subordination of women to male rule, one must add to Scripture concepts not mentioned in its pages. Traditionalist teaching is frequently laden with words and phrases such as "chain of command," "covering," and "man as priest of the home"; but these common expressions are nowhere to be found in the Bible. These concepts rest almost entirely on an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 that assumes "head" is a metaphor for authority and this somehow makes a man a representative of God to his wife and family. That is far from obvious from either the text or the context.

Unless the two New Testament references to the husband as head of the wife can be shown indisputably to speak of every man's universal and God-ordained authority over his wife, traditionalists are left with the need to make a huge inference—namely, that the exhortation to women to submit to their husbands entails an exhortation to men to exercise authority over their wives. The fact that women are told to submit to their husbands, as all believers are to one another (Eph. 5:21), is in itself inconclusive. One must infer that this wily submission is meant to be both unilateral and universal, and neither mutual nor culturally specific.

The Bible never actually commands men to assume authority over their wives. That is inferred from the chain of command idea, which is inferred from the idea that husbandly head means husbandly authority, which, in turn, is inferred from cultural preconceptions about the meaning of head and the role of the husband. Today we have books, radio messages, sermons, seminars, and magazine articles directly and repeatedly exhorting...
men to do something the Bible not once directly exhorts them to do—to assume leadership of their wives and families as God’s representatives to them.

Rather than importing extrabiblical assumptions to shore up the weak links in the traditionalist system, it seems wiser to interpret “the husband as head” according to its biblical context. First Corinthians 11 doesn’t help us too much here, because Paul employs “head” primarily as a word play or pun in the course of his argument; it is not explained or illustrated (although the order in which the “head” relationships are stated in verse 3 suggests the meaning of “source” rather than “authority”). Husbandly “headship” is given some explanation and illustration in Ephesians 5:25-31, where the husband’s role is described as life-giving, self-giving love. Here “headship” speaks more of mutual submission than male authority. Here, too, an understanding of “head” as a metaphor for source of life rather than authority is more compatible with the biblical context.

It also seems wiser to interpret 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as a prohibition intended for particular women in a particular circumstance. The traditional interpretation, which bans all women everywhere for all time from leading and teaching doctrine to men, contradicts New Testament evidence and approval of women who did exercise church leadership and teach correct doctrine to men. Priscilla was one such woman, who, with her husband taught correct doctrine to Apollos, a noted leader and teacher in the early church; and the teaching she offered Apollos was taken by him as authoritative (Acts 18:26). The fact that Scripture usually lists Priscilla’s name first and her husband’s second indicates that she probably was the prominent member of the teaching team; there is no evidence that she was teaching as a secondary partner under the “covering” of her husband’s spiritual authority.

Finally, I recognize that the Bible does not spell out this issue of gender roles with cut-and-dried clarity. A case can be made, without sacrificing belief in biblical authority, for either equality or hierarchy. The doctrine of sexual hierarchy, however, must be reconciled somehow with the clear biblical teaching on the essential equality of all persons before God. A solution to this problem is routinely sought through recourse to the logically problematic notion that women are “equal in being but different in function.” In other words, even though a woman’s womanhood renders her subordinate to man’s authority for the entire scope and duration of her life, she is nonetheless somehow “equal in being” with men. The equalitarian view, however, aligns readily with the overall spirit of the Bible, which proclaims the equality of all types of people within the redeemed community—whether male or female, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, and so forth. It would seem the burden of proof should be on the one who seeks a clear and consistent biblical mandate for a universal exception to this principle of mutuality and equality among the members of the body of Christ.

Biblical equality also has the theological advantage. The more I study this issue, the more convinced I become that a viable and biblically consistent theology of sexuality must be firmly grounded in the biblical teachings concerning the creation of both man and woman as equally imaging God, the priesthood of all believers, and Christ as the one mediator between God and humanity. The implications of these fundamental theological principles rule out any universal hierarchies or cosmic principles of male supremacy.

It is important that the case for biblical equality receive a fair hearing and enjoy a civil discussion in the evangelical community. This cannot happen, however, as long as people are afraid that there is an insidious, underlying, secularizing agenda to evangelical feminism. As an antidote to these fears, I have tried to explain the fundamental differences between evangelical feminism and other forms of modern feminism, and to show that these fundamental differences disqualify evangelical feminism from being dismissed as an antibiblical belief system that derives . . . from modern secular culture. My hope is that a clarification of what is and is not at stake in this conflict will help lay the groundwork for a healthy debate on an issue that is, indeed, legitimately debatable on biblical grounds.

Beyond Sex Roles: Priscilla as the Author of Hebrews

Gilbert Bilezikian

Editor’s Note: Gilbert Bilezikian published the especially influential book, Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family, in 1985—shortly before the founding of CBE International. Second and third editions appeared in 1989 and 2006. All three were published by Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group. The third edition included an extended endnote (note 55, pp. 248-50), which we reproduce here with kind permission from both the author and the publisher.

Luther’s suggestion that Apollos is the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has much to commend it. Should this be the case, we would be indebted to Priscilla for many of the insights contained in that great document.

Even more intriguing is the theory that Priscilla herself is the author of Hebrews (A. Harnack, A. S. Peake, O. Michel, R. Hoppin, among others).

It is not inconceivable that Priscilla had been commissioned by church leaders to address the issue of the relation of the two covenants. As a Jewish leader who had been associated with the now-deceased apostle Paul during his teaching ministry, she would be uniquely qualified to write authoritatively on an issue that they had confronted together repeatedly in their ministries to Jewish-Gentile churches. Because of the antifemale bias of the Judeo-Christian congregations, she may have been requested to write anonymously, with her identity known only by the local leaders who had given her the assignment. In this manner she would be able to address the issue from her expertise as a scholar of Jewish background, under the cover of apostolic authority derived from her close association with the apostle Paul and other worthies of the apostolic church.

In so doing, she may also have set a precedent for nonapostles such as Mark, James, and Jude, but especially for Luke, as he wrote the third Gospel and the book of Acts, both anonymous in the text but authoritative for the church on the strength of Luke’s association with Paul. This device of semi-anonymity would enable her to direct her exhortations to Christians wavering between the two covenants without her gender being an obstacle for the acceptance of her message by the tradition-bound Judaizing believers. This theory would help explain a number of baffling features of the epistle.

a. It could account for the absence of an authorial superscription and the conspiracy of anonymity that surrounded its authorship in the ancient church. The lack of any firm data concerning the identity of the author in the extant writings of the church suggests a deliberate suppression more than a case of collective memory loss.

b. The assignment of such a task to Priscilla would explain the strange nature of this document, which is a cross between an epistle and a treatise. The author would be writing a general tract without the concrete historical specificity that would implicate her identity but with the real needs of a congregation in mind.

c. This theory would account for the tone of respectful deference extended to leaders among the readers, especially if the author had been commissioned by them to write the document incognito. The readers are called “holy brethren” (Heb. 3:1). They are exhorted to remember their leaders and to imitate their faith (13:17). In so doing, the author would place herself under the warrant of the leaders’ credentials for the acceptance of her message.

d. The theory of Priscillan authorship would also provide an explanation for a number of semi-apologetic pleas for credibility found in the epistle. Statements such as the following seem to address a hindrance that pertains to the status of the author without constituting a reason for disqualification as a doctor of the church.

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. (Heb. 13:18-19)

I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. (Heb. 13:22)

e. The theory would also account for the baffling remark made by the author prior to delving into high doctrine, “This we will do if God permits” (6:3). Rather than expressing confidence that death will not strike with the next dip of the pen, this statement seems to appeal to divine authority in pressing on to the exposition of the deeper dimensions of the Christian faith.

Likewise, the mention of the author’s travel plans as a companion of Timothy would make sense for a woman teacher desirous of receiving from Paul’s male disciple the guarantee of his advocacy as she would enter an alien and possibly unwelcoming church situation (13:23).

Such references would constitute subtle hints of the author’s understanding of the limitations pertaining to her status in a code language comprehensible to readers aware of her identity. In this light, the gender of the participle diágoumenon in 11:32 need not be anything more than an editorial masculine.

f. The explicit references as well as several allusions to women as exemplars of faith in Hebrews 11 come...
there was a woman used by God to implement his will. The origin of each phase of the unfolding story of redemption, allusive, illustrate the causalities of sacred history. At the death by the resurrection. God gave the Messiah to the world and recovered him after achievements, cannot but evoke the figure of Mary, who coming as the culmination of the list of faith's victorious heroes of faith stood great women of faith. Barak owed his victory to Deborah (Judg. 4-5), Jephthah to his daughter's sacrifice (Judg. 11:31), this mention of the resurrection, prophets ministry in the old covenant (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37), this mention of the resurrection, Hebrews is to those who "received their dead by resurrection." (11:35). Although the reference is to the Hebrews so as to place the more prominent figure in first position. Gideon was more significant than Barak, Samson than Jephthah, and David than Samuel. However, in each case, the lesser figure placed in second position against the historical sequence was the one who set a precedent for or heralded the ministry of the more dominant personage. Thus, Barak the warrior set a precedent for Gideon; likewise, Jephthah paved the way for Samson; and without Samuel's ministry there would have been no David.

Interestingly, the ministry of each lesser individual (Barak, Jephthah, Samuel) was made possible by a woman. Barak owed his victory to Deborah (Judg. 4-5), Jephthah to his daughter's sacrifice (Judg. 11), and Samuel owed his ministry to the dedication of his mother, Hannah (1 Sam. 1). Indeed, by resorting to the subtle device of name inversions, the author of Hebrews seems to convey the message that God used the discreet ministries of women chosen by him to bring about the history-shaping deliverances of Gideon, Samson, and David. Behind the spectacular accomplishments of the heroes of faith stood great women of faith.

The last reference to women in this chapter of Hebrews is to those who “received their dead by resurrection” (11:35). Although the reference is to the prophetic ministry in the old covenant (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37), this mention of the resurrection, coming as the culmination of the list of faith’s victorious achievements, cannot but evoke the figure of Mary, who gave the Messiah to the world and recovered him after death by the resurrection.

These seven reference to women, either explicit or allusive, illustrate the causalities of sacred history. At the origin of each phase of the unfolding story of redemption, there was a woman used by God to implement his will.

Sarah originated the people of God.

The daughter of Pharaoh brought up Moses the liberator as her son.

Rahab made possible the entrance of the people into the promised land.

Deborah and Jephthah’s daughter opened the way for the victories of Gideon and Samson.

Hannah was instrumental in the rise of David, whose descendant was to be the Savior.

And Mary gave him to the world.

Obviously, a male author sensitive to God’s activity in history across the gender difference would have been able to outline this noble epic. But the discreet development of the theme suggests the restrained hand of a woman.

g. Finally, the nurturing, human, compassionate tone of Hebrews has often been noted, along with a special interest in childhood (2:14; 5:8; 12:7-11). Such motifs are in line with J. Massyngberde Ford’s assessment that “we gain [in Hebrews] glimpses of Jesus’s character which do not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, qualities, which would be especially appealing to a woman—compassion, gentleness, and understanding of human weakness. No New Testament writing exhibits such a unique and delicate poise between the human and divine nature of Jesus or expresses his role as High Priest as does the Epistle to the Hebrews” (“The Mother of Jesus and the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” The Bible Today 82 [February 1976]: 684).

At this stage of New Testament research, the Priscillian authorship of Hebrews remains a theory. But the sketchy remarks above suggest that it is a theory worthy of consideration and of additional exploration. The same Priscilla who taught Apollos when he was already an eloquent man—well versed in Scripture, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus (Acts 18:24-26)—could be the one who continues to nurture the life and thought of the church through this ageless portion of Scripture (see Ruth Hoppin, Priscilla’s Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews [Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 2000]).

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Walter Brueggemann dedicates his seminal work, *The Prophetic Imagination*: “For my sisters in ministry who teach me daily about the power of grief and the gift of amazement.” As he describes the grief and amazement that together shape the prophetic imagination, he also describes the story of many women in ministry—lamenting what is broken in themselves, the church, and the world while also imagining what can be.

When I read his dedication, as a woman still learning how to lead, I was moved to tears. To have both the pain and the joy of this calling verbalized—even called prophetic—gave that tension value. I saw for the first time that God could use what previously had seemed to disqualify me. It stretched my own imagination of how God might use me and my sisters.

Tara Beth Leach’s book, *Emboldened*, takes me to the same place, where there is room for women’s burdens and for an imagination of what could be possible if we really did this thing we are called to do. With unapologetically maternal warmth and authority, Tara Beth sits with readers like a big sister. She makes space for the frustrations and pain without condescension or bitterness. She acknowledges the baggage and cultural challenges without leading us into victimhood. Above all, she presses forward with courage, joy, and imagination.

The book has two main sections: Emboldened Women and A Vision for an Emboldened Church. These create a healthy balance: giving voice to the very real, personal issues women have to face while also placing those within our broader mission, weaving our healing into the healing of the church.

The primary audience of *Emboldened* is women preparing for or engaged in ministry. The author sometimes addresses her audience directly as “dear sister . . . .” She is careful to remember just how many different kinds of women may be reading, sure not to force her readers into the false choices they may be presented elsewhere:

Kingdom women are diverse, you see. We have gifts to teach, preach, prophesy, serve, lead, and build. We are church planters, we are kitchen ladies, we are number crunchers, we are directors, and we are worship leaders. We are nurturing, we are assertive, we are maternal, and we are fierce. We are full of wisdom, and we are also new Christians. Many have tried to box us in or tell us who we should be, but when we look to Christ, we see cruciformity, love, grace, courage, and presence. Sure, try to box us in, but we are kingdom women, and we are diverse. (67)

While she speaks directly to her sisters, Tara Beth seems hopeful there are men reading over the shoulders of their wives and female students and colleagues, looping those men into this conversation out of her conviction that this issue will bring us all freedom—men and women alike. Throughout she references the debate about whether women should lead but spends little time defending. Setting aside the conversation about whether women should lead allows Tara Beth to instead share how women can lead. And while she describes this well, what is even more powerful is how she models it in her authoritative and pastoral tone.

Once we step away from arguments that ask us to defend our call, women can talk about their call in the way they often experience it—love. Whether they express it as love for a mission, a group of people in need, the church, the Lord or all of the above, most ministry women I know are motivated by love. Love does not seem professional and it certainly will not win any arguments to justify our calling. But as *Emboldened* calls us toward a better imagination of what can be for us, for the church, for the world, it is not an imagination fueled by bitterness or ambition but by love.

Throughout the history of his engagement with his people, when God has wanted to stretch our imagination, he has embodied a new reality—by gathering a nation, by coming in human form, by creating his church. And the witness of those embodied truths has spoken volumes. Any caricature we have had of him or of ourselves is shown to be two-dimensional in the face of a community living shalom and in the face of a God who now has a human face.

The same is true of God’s desire to stretch our imagination of leadership. We would all agree that our image of Christian leadership has become warped. And we would all agree that the conversation about women in leadership has become toxic. It is time for a new way to imagine what leadership looks like to imagine it beyond power-struggles and us-and-them language. It is time to reimagine what shared leadership looks like and discover the unique gifts women can offer for the flourishing of the church. And as we do, we will not only empower more children of God to live out their gifts, we will rediscover who we are as the church.

And so, at such a time as this, God is raising up women to not only talk about but to embody a new kind of leadership. And women like Tara Beth embody a Christlike leadership which cannot be ignored. Her passion and generous spirit, her conviction and humble boldness reveal to us the very Spirit of God and his heart for his church.
Theologian and author Alice Mathews recently said in a Christianity Today interview with Hannah Anderson, “Satan knows that if he can keep women out of service, in the church and in the world, he will have won an enormous victory.” Mathews's most recent book, Gender Roles and the People of God, takes back some of the territory gained by the enemy.

According to Mathews, “In many churches and denominations around the world, the subject of how men and women relate in the church has become a third-rail issue.” In other words, engage at your own risk. Perhaps because of this reality, far too many churches and Christian academic institutions seem content to allow a few loud voices to control the conversation. Rather than resigning herself to limited options, Mathews has spent a good portion of her life combing through scripture to determine if exclusionary practices can be supported.

In ch. 1, Dangers of a Misleading Reading, she outlines how readers can critically evaluate biblical texts to discern how cultural mores and personal biases (their own as well as those of the loud voices) may interfere with interpretation. Mathews advocates that readers include the context and “listen to the full testimony of Scripture” rather than plucking certain texts out of context to support a particular interpretation. With that clear metric, she begins a historical overview of patriarchy by asking:

Is the Bible “patriarchal”? If we mean by that question, does the Bible accurately describe the patriarchal societies, beliefs, and actions recorded in the Scripture, the answer is yes. . . . But if we mean, does the Bible endorse the patriarchal culture in which its history and teachings are displayed, the answer is no. This is the difference between what is descriptive and what is prescriptive in the Bible.

Mathews’s perspective is that the creation account reveals complete equality between Adam and Eve without God-ordained hierarchy. She writes, “Eve was not created to serve Adam but to serve with him.” The remaining arguments in Gender Roles and the People of God hinge on this understanding, coupled with her belief that scripture does not support the eternal subordination of Jesus to God the Father.

In the subsequent chapters of Part One, Mathews points to women in positions of leadership throughout the OT (e.g., the midwives Shiprah and Puah in Exod 1, Deborah in Judg 4-5, and Abigail in 1 Sam 25). She then offers examples of how Jesus overturned gender hierarchies—what Mathews refers to as “the Divine Counterpunch.”

In Part Two, Mathews analyzes the theology behind gender-based hierarchies by digging into four familiar texts often used to justify exclusionary practices: 1 Tim 2:8-15, 1 Cor 11:3, 1 Cor 14:34-35, and Eph 5:21-33. For example, countless of us have sat squirming in pews while pastors have used 1 Tim 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man. . . .”) [NIV] as justification that women should never teach or have authority over men. Without sufficient understanding of the cultural context, ancient languages, and the arc of scripture, it might indeed seem that Paul was issuing a universal prohibition. Mathews does not agree.

She invites us to place the verse within the historical and sociological context of the time period. Rather than conclude that the apostle was forbidding all women from teaching or from having authority over men for all time, she argues that Paul was urging Timothy to decisively counteract heretical teaching and un-Christlike behavior (e.g., misandry, the hatred of men) that prevailed in Ephesus at that time.

Based on Mathews’s scholarship, “the prohibition in 2:12 is against grasping for unauthorized authority to teach a man in a high-handed or despotic manner.” Furthermore, as she explains in her chapter of How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership (ed. Alan Johnson, Zondervan, 2010), it appears that “while the norm in healthy churches was the full partnership of men and women in ministry, some churches in crisis (in Ephesus and Crete) needed remedial leadership that excluded most men as well as all women. . . . The one reality did not cancel out the other.”

In the final section of Gender Roles and the People of God, Mathews excavates history to reveal how specific men (Aristotle, Tertullian, and Augustine) and certain church movements used scripture to create gender hierarchies and subsequently fused their perspective with scripture. Tertullian espoused his belief that “the Christian woman was responsible not only for her own chastity, but for male chastity as well. She wasn’t chaste if in any way she excited a man’s imagination sexually.” Such misguided and harmful logic has been used to blame women for men's bad behavior for more than two thousand years.

At the conclusion of Gender Roles and the People of God, Mathews’s scholarship helps readers understand how God has created men and women as two complementary genders that, in Carolyn Custis James’s words, form “a Blessed Alliance,” fulfilling God’s mandate together, as a team. I feel deeply indebted to the author for her life-long pursuit of this truth. I certainly hope that Mathews, age 86, will continue to write and thereby inform and encourage women—and men—around the globe.

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The four-volume *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity (DDL)* provides a well-rounded overview of life not only across time periods but also across the several cultures of the biblical world. Thirty-three scholars, including editors Edwin M. Yamauchi (Professor Emeritus of History at Miami University) and Marvin R. Wilson (Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College), have contributed to the DDL. Readers of *Priscilla Papers* will tend to regret that only three of these contributors are women (Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer, Robin Gallaher Branch, and Laura A. Dunn). The selection of articles and the information included in them is broad and balanced; nevertheless, a broader diversity of authorship could make the study richer. All contributors are reputable scholars and have provided high quality and up-to-date information.

Before proceeding with a summary of some of the content, it is encouraging to note that DDL recently became available in a one-volume, 2000-page edition, thus making it more affordable (about $65). In addition, several of the lengthy articles are available as inexpensive individual Kindle downloads (e.g., “Abortion,” “Adoption,” “Adultery,” “Contraception and Control of Births,” “Hair,” “Infanticide and Exposure,” “Inheritance,” “Marriage,” “Purity and Impurity,” “Same-Sex Relations,” “Widows and Orphans”).

The extensive variety of topics brings the time period to life. The articles were chosen “based on the Human Relations Area Files, an anthropological grid of human society, which would systematically and comparatively survey different aspects of culture” (Introduction, see also http://hraf.yale.edu). As a result, the categories addressed are more extensive than similar reference works. Because DDL covers features of everyday life, the subject matter is relatable to our own everyday lives as well. Though we are far removed from the time period, we share many of their basic human needs and interests, such as relationships, health care, and entertainment. Included are a considerable number of topics that the average Bible student, or even scholar, would not typically encounter, such as laundry and men’s beards.

It should be noted that this sociological (rather than theological or even historical) categorizing results in the absence of some articles that would be expected by those of us accustomed to Bible dictionaries. For example, an article on women as prophets, or even on prophecy in general, is absent. We should keep in mind, therefore, that the purpose of the DDL is significantly different, for example, from the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 2001) or the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2000)—both of which include substantial articles on prophecy and thus mention women who were biblical prophets. But neither of these reference works includes an entry on rape, for example (as the DDL does). The topic of abortion serves as an illustration of the nature of the DDL. Its entry is about abortion in the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman empire. The article on abortion in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, in contrast, discusses evangelical views of abortion in the modern world. In short, we need to take seriously the title, and therefore the nature, of the DDL and thus accept both its benefits and its limitations.

The purpose of this review is to narrow the topic to how women’s daily lives are addressed. Most of the research about women is related to marriage and motherhood. We learn in DDL, for example, that Augustine defined marriage as follows: “But there is no matrimony where motherhood is prevented: for then there is no wife (Man. 18).” That is to say, the main purpose of a wife is to reproduce, whereas the husband is not held to the same standard (Vol. 1, 365). This double standard is bothersome to those who value egalitarian marriage, and we learn in other sections how married couples conducted their relationship when reproduction was not central. For example, when a woman in Egypt did not bear children she still was a mother to the children that slave women bore for her husband (Vol. 2, 118).

It is enlightening to learn how and when women ended marriages. Based on biblical examples of divorce, “it was only the husband’s prerogative to divorce his wife” (Vol. 2, 113). In Greece, however, when a husband failed to act on this prerogative, a wife could legally invoke the privilege of a close relative, such as her father, in order to leave an unhealthy marriage (Vol. 2, 118-19).

“Childbearing” and other articles related to motherhood span the four volumes. We learn, for example, that in some cultures, including much of the Greco-Roman world, people believed the gods punished women with sterility (Vol. 1, 284). The OT alludes to this belief and also to purity laws concerning a woman who has conceived: “A woman who bore a son was unclean for 40 days, while one who bore a daughter was unclean for 80 days (Lev 12)” (Vol. 1, 281). Not only was the mother unclean for a significant amount of time for a natural biological process, but she was twice as unclean if she bore a girl. Up to twenty percent of women who gave birth did not live to abide by purity laws because they died in childbirth—statistics that we do not learn in scripture itself (Vol. 1, 284). Of the babies who survived, only half lived past five years old (Vol. 1, 285). It is sobering to read that an act that brings life—life which bears the image of God—has been viewed with such negative connotations.

Women who nursed their babies not only benefited from the nutrients they were giving their children but also benefited from this natural form of contraception that lasted a few years while they were nursing (Vol. 3, 459). This was one way in which women often had control over their reproductive systems. Women typically nursed their children by themselves because reproduction was not central. For example, when a woman in Egypt did not bear children she still was a mother to the children that slave women bore for her husband (Vol. 2, 118). It is sobering to read that an act that brings life—life which bears the image of God—has been viewed with such negative connotations.

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mention of the early Christian martyr, Perpetua, whose diary is still available today: "One of the most dramatic and authentic stories of martyrdom is that of Perpetua, a young noblewoman who, when she was martyred, was twenty-two years of age and a nursing mother" (Vol. 3, 479). Even something as natural and basic as feeding a child can enlighten us to the significance of women in church history.

Reading about certain social constructs from biblical antiquity can be distressing. Such cases include the powerless state of orphans and many widows. However, we learn from a variety of biblical and extra-biblical documents how communities and laws supported (or did not support) women. The Levirate marriage law in the OT, for example, provided a woman with a husband and children if she became a widow before having a child (Vol. 4, 419). The Code of Hammurabi protected a widow by giving her what is beneficial from the late husband’s estate as well as benefits from the current husband’s estate (Vol. 4, 423). Widows in Greece retained power in the only realm where women could have power, the household (Vol. 4, 425).

In addition to family matters, DDL is also helpful regarding women’s education. We learn, for example, that Musonius Rufus was an egalitarian activist in Rome in the first century AD, particularly regarding equal educational opportunities (Vol. 2, 270). He is significant because women’s education typically "stopped at puberty so that they could prepare for marriage, with the exception of girls from noble families, who could be privately tutored" (Vol. 2, 248). Education for females growing up in Sparta included athletics, in hopes of building strength for motherhood (Vol. 2, 259).

The numerous articles are manageable in length while also providing impressive detail. The length of the articles varies, but most range from ten to thirty pages. The articles address the OT and NT, the Jewish and Christian faiths, and the overlapping Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman worlds.

Color photographs enhance the end of each volume, documenting archaeological finds that relate to the subjects in the book. For example, archaeological excavations from the ancient Near East show that “all the graves of women contained the remains of cosmetic preparations” (Vol. 1, 368). In the early church, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Jerome warned against the use of cosmetics as being sinful (Vol. 1, 372).

The extensive table of contents will surely point the reader in the direction of almost any question about antiquity, including various matters pertaining to the lives of women in the cultures of the biblical and early post-biblical eras.

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CBE International

CBE International (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28.

Mission Statement

CBE exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.

Statement of Faith

- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons equal in power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God’s image and given equal authority and stewardship of God’s creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

Core Values

- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
- Christ’s redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God’s design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women’s gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

Envisioned Future

CBE envisions a future where all believers are freed to exercise their gifts for God’s glory and purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

CBE Membership

To celebrate 30 years of ministry, CBE is pleased to make available, for free, every Priscilla Papers article ever published. In addition, find the full archive of CBE’s magazine, Mutuality, and hundreds of book reviews and recordings of lectures given by world-renowned scholars like N.T. Wright, Gordon Fee, and more!

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Their Influence, Authority, and Legacy in the Second through Fifth Centuries
Lynn H. Cohick, Amy Brown Hughes

From facing wild beasts in the arena to governing the Roman Empire, Christian women—as preachers and philosophers, martyrs and empresses, virgins and mothers— influenced the shape of the church in its formative centuries. This book provides a single volume of a nearly complete compendium of extant evidence about Christian women in the second through fifth centuries.

Gender Roles and the People of God
Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church
Alice Mathews

Mathews surveys the roles women have played in the Bible and throughout church history, demonstrating both the inspiring contributions of women and the many hurdles that have been placed in their path. Along the way, she investigates the difficult passages often used to preclude women from certain areas of service, pointing to better and more faithful understandings of those verses.

The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity
Kevin Giles

“...Giles tells the compelling story of the rise and fall of the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity, which espoused a hierarchical view of the Father/Son relationship to argue that women are subordinate to men as the Son was supposedly subordinate to the Father in eternity... Those interested in these matters will want to read this book.”—Paul D. Molnar, Professor of Systematic Theology, St. John’s University, Queens

Women in the Story of Jesus
The Gospels through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters
Marian Ann Taylor, Heather Weir

This volume gathers the writings of thirty-one nineteenth-century women on the stories of women in the Gospels. Retrieving and analyzing rarely read works by Christina Rossetti, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Wordsworth, and many others, Women in the Story of Jesus illuminates the biblical text, recovers a neglected chapter of reception history, and helps us understand and apply Scripture in our present context.