

Packer acknowledges that God gifts women to preach and teach and that women's preaching and teaching carries God's authority. At the same time, Packer insists that two Pauline passages forbid women from even speaking in church. In his effort to reconcile both beliefs, he holds on to the so-called "male headship principle"<sup>18</sup> and bases his thinking on his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23. However, it remains unclear as to exactly what Packer means by "the male headship principle." For Packer, are *all* women supposed to submit to *all* men, or only the wife to her husband? What is the universally accepted age for attaining to manhood? Should a mother obey her son, because he is her "head"? One wonders how male slaves managed their female owners when the church sanctioned slavery!

Contrary to popular opinion, the word translated "head" in Corinthians and Ephesians does not suggest male authority over women, unless we read the meaning of "ruler" or "the one in charge" into the word "head." Although many people have taught man's rule over woman as God's design, such a model of relating to one another is untenable in light of the Corinthian context. For, if "head" in 1 Corinthians 11 does suggest a hierarchy or chain of command, then how would we understand the immediately preceding verse, "God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor 11:3)? Applying such a definition of "head" to the Godhead would imply that hierarchy and inequality exist within the Trinity, a teaching that the early councils rejected as the heresy of Subordinationism. "Head," therefore, cannot mean "ruler" or "one with authority" in the above passage.

Paul, however, does explain his use of the word "head" in his discussion of origins (1 Cor 11:8, 11-12), where he defines "head" (*kephale* in Greek) as the "origin" of beings.<sup>19</sup> Paul's argument proceeds as follows:

1. Adam is the origin of Eve in creation, and in this sense her "head";
2. All men, since Adam, have come from women, implying that woman is now man's "head";
3. Finally, both man and woman ultimately originate from God, therefore God is the "head" of all.

According to Paul's account of Creation (which is consistent with Genesis 2), Adam was not formed because of Eve, but Eve was formed *because* of Adam's need: It was not good in God's eyes for the man to be alone. Therefore in answer to that need, God said, "I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18). Most significantly, the Hebrew word "helper" (*ezer*) does not denote an "assistant" or "subordinate" but rather a person of equal (or even greater) strength and ability than the one being helped.

Remarkably, however, most English translations of 1 Corinthians 11:9 replace the word "because" with "for" or "for the sake of," despite the fact that the New Testament consistently translates the very same word in the given

## SUMMARY OF PACKER'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST WOMEN'S ORDINATION

Response by David Scholer

**Packer:** The authority of Scripture is at stake. No women in Scripture were presbyters. Therefore women ought not to be presbyters and ought not to be ordained.

**Response:** This argument is inconsistent and begs the question. The argument equates "presbyter" with being ordained and with the exercise of authority. This is inconsistent with the introduction to Packer's own article in which he affirms that Scripture does not prohibit women teaching. There is no direct reference to ordination in Scripture. Paul was not "ordained" in the sense referred to by Packer. Only in Timothy is there any mention of ordination and that is not the same as today's notion of ordination. Packer agrees 1 Timothy 2 does not prohibit women as teachers and preachers in the church but also says that they should not be ordained. This is contradictory. "He wants to have his cake and eat it too."

**Packer:** Males "obviously" better represent Christ than females.

**Response:** The doctrine of the Incarnation emphasizes Christ's humanity, to redeem not just men but *all* humans; not maleness but humanness. That he became flesh, *not* that he became male, is the emphasis of the New Testament. For the argument to revolve around Christ's maleness is an extraneous intrusion into the biblical argument.

**Packer:** The significance of gender determines one's roles. Females are serving, subordinate and supportive; males are initiators and leaders.

**Response:** This is a cultural argument and not a biblical argument. It also misreads Genesis 2 and reflects only the traditional, patriarchal, male-centered paternalistic attitudes about gender roles that we see in society.

**Packer:** The example of Mary is a model for women—the "final proof" of not needing ordination for women. She subordinated herself to Jesus.

**Response:** This is a remarkable argument, that Mary proves the non-necessity of women's ordination. If anything, she is the proof of the non-necessity of ordination of anybody, male or female. Why just women? What Packer draws from the example of Mary is that here is someone who plays the servant role. She subordinated herself to Jesus. But is not that something men need to do also? Apparently only women, according to Packer, need to model true discipleship.

Packer thus uses Mary as a model exclusively for women. He misreads what Mary's discipleship meant. He confuses ministry and service on the one hand and ordination on the other. If ordination is to have any biblical sense at all it is ordination to be a servant.

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