

PRISCILLA

“PRISCILLA AND AQUILA
INSTRUCTED APOLLOS
MORE PERFECTLY IN THE
WAY OF THE LORD”
(ACTS 18)

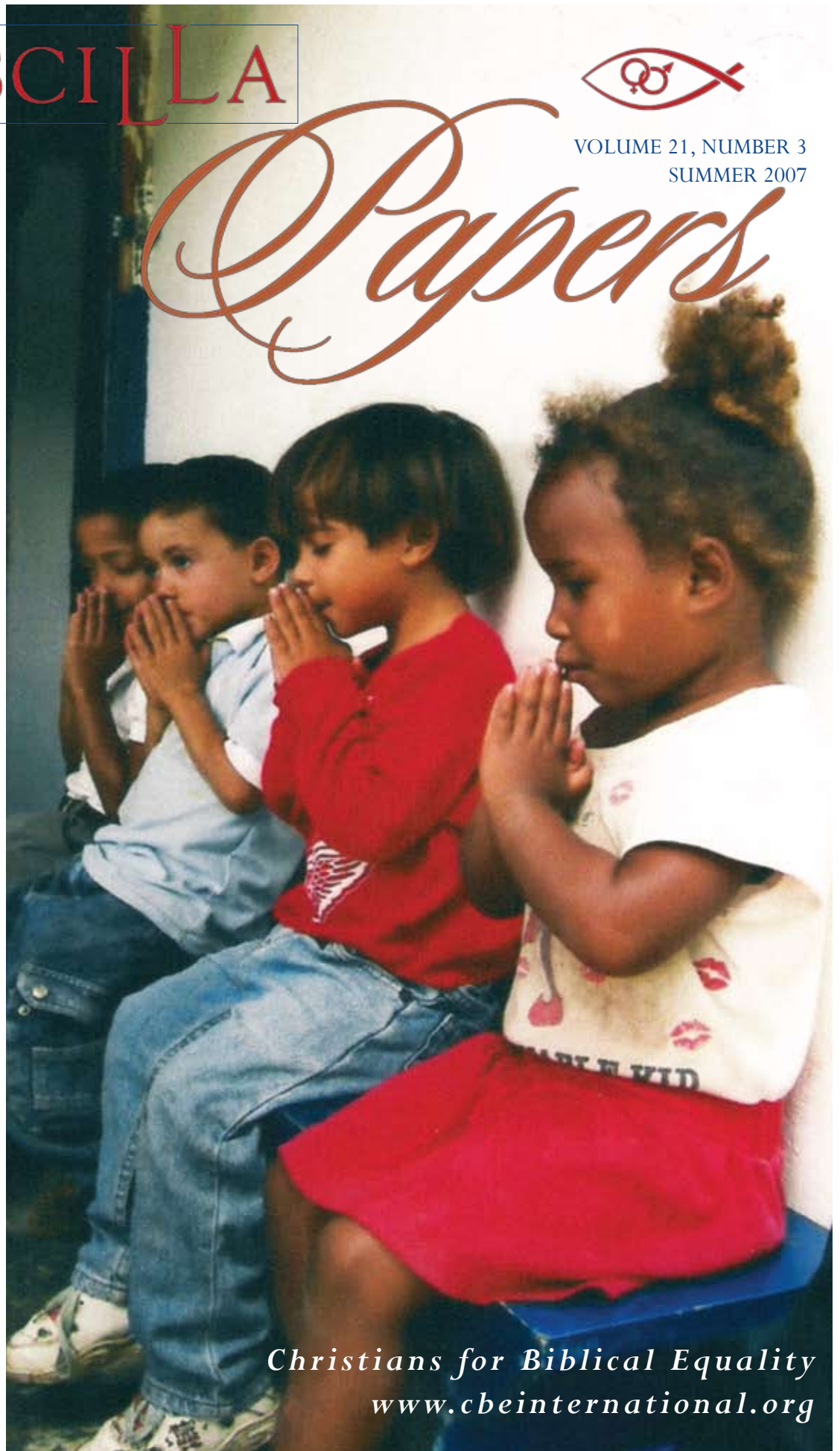


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When Aída and I were living and ministering in the center of Newark, New Jersey, first as interns in the summer of 1970 and then as missionaries in the years between 1974 and 1978, we slowly came to realize that the complex set of social, racial, and economic problems in which our city was enmeshed originated not in itself, but extended as a legacy of oppression from the conquest of the New World itself. More

than a decade later, I dissected those problems in the chapter I wrote for our book, *The Global God*. The deeper we involved ourselves in the imprisoned lives in our neighborhood, the deeper we realized the issues ran with spiritual, practical, and historical attitudes and behaviors that were inexorably intertwined. You can lead someone to water, but they may no longer have the heart to drink it.

One solace we enjoyed along with the rest of our neighborhood was the kung fu movies at the local theater. Life was so complex, evil so entrenched, good so compromised within a corrupt and complex environment. But, in those punchy parables, large and overbearing evil met small and scrappy good, and—especially in the case of the Bruce Lee versions—evil took it on the chin and went down for the full count. When I say the neighborhood turned out, I mean mothers with babes in tow went into

the theater at 10 a.m. and stayed all day, watching the same double feature over and over again. By the time we arrived in the evening, the audience was shouting the dialogue before it happened, all of us—yours truly included—commenting on each scene with a kind of communitarian exegesis in our best standard northern urban New Jersey patois: “Watch dis fool! Bruce gon’ kick his butt!” And then we would cheer loudly with a gusto unleashed in the suburbs solely during Thanksgiving Day football games. At the end of each evening, the crowd, black, Hispanic, and me, would say goodbye to each other, wandering back into the urban morass, but with back a little straighter, eye a little brighter, step a little surer. It was purgative in its own way, especially in the metamorphosis following *The Chinese Connection*, when the protagonist stopped dying in the respected, age-old Eastern way and began to live and win.

But, as kung fu movies matured, art caught up with them. Today, a breathtakingly beautiful set of Eastern films has been released, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*; *Hero*; *The House of Flying Daggers*; and so on, that return the tragic legacy—inevitable death within quintessential beauty. After watching the phenomenal success of the Hong Kong film industry, mainland China, basing its work in Beijing, released an exquisite film, *The Curse of the Golden Flower*, that is the most chilling portrayal of patriarchy gone awry that one could watch. The film appears to be a devastating critique of the imperial past—a sort of “why we

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should all be glad we are now communists and (ostensibly) equal, because look at how they lived—all that horror in all that splendor.” In the mainland movie, the plot is character driven. The absolute emperor—father of nation and family—has put aside his faithful first wife (whom he has pedestaled in a lovely shrine while dispatching an assassin to murder her) and married a princess in order to rise from guard captain to chief of state. In the process, he drives his new wife to incest, alienates his children, and ends up slaughtering them all, while his people bow before him in a celebration. He quietly eats dinner as the blood of his family flows around him. All this is done within the most opulent scenery conceivable—and the lesson hammered home notwithstanding the mainland substitution of Chairman Mao for the emperor as *paterfamilias*.

Jesus counseled, “Do not (you plural) call (someone) your father on earth” (Matt. 23:9, my literal trans.). Exegetes have puzzled over what exactly he meant, since we who are privileged to have loving fathers cherish them and gladly follow the fifth commandment to honor them and our mothers. This mainland Chinese parable of patriarchy gone awry illustrates what Jesus meant. Christians should never allow any earthly authority figures to usurp the place of ultimate authority that belongs to God. Human authority must be contained in the human realm. Jesus is not an anarchist, of course. His followers are good citizens who are willing to “render” what is due to Caesar (Matt. 22:21). But our allegiance is to be an act of our will that we give to earthly rulers because we want to respect our God and point them by our deference to God. Freedom of the will is that which distinguishes submission from subjection. Submission is an act of respect that one pays to a parent, an employer, or a head of state. Subjection is an invasive action that someone exacts over others, often in a quest to become an authority figure. The first is cooperative, the second coercive. The *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* I consult (1983) does not use the word “subjection” in defining any of the related forms of the word “submission.” It also omits it as a synonym. It does, however, under “subject,” employ “submissive” to describe the willing act of placing oneself under the authority of another, making oneself subject (actively), or subordinate, but, otherwise, it maintains a distinction between the two words. Being made submissive by another is clearly not an option. Today, however, some Christians seem to be confusing submission and subjection.

When we were college chaplains, we helped out a foolish student who had married precipitously on impulse with no forethought and no money. We did not perform the wedding; a justice of the peace precipitated that. We were called in to pick up the pieces of two people who were not ready to be married—financially, emotionally, relationally, or spiritually. In gratitude, the husband invited us over to visit their new apartment. No

sooner had we arrived than he turned to his wife and called boisterously, “Wife, submit!” It was appalling. I pulled him aside and shared what counsel I could—but, as before, he was not open. We left deeply disturbed. Immediately, she was pregnant. Then, in a fit of ire, he hit her. The marriage was over. The last I ever saw him, he had left school and was on the run from her brothers

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who were out to avenge the beating of their sister. How many times do attitude and action unite? What is purgative in an action movie can be lethal in real life. Instead of wise like serpents, we can become as poisonous as one. We have to pause and think through our concepts, what we believe,

and when and how they should be extended into practice. No greater need exists than to do this with the concept of submission and the need within the faith for submission not to degenerate into subjection. This is the theme of this issue.

J. Martha Compleman-Blair opens with an accessible approach to developing new hermeneutical, or interpretive, principles for viewing submission in the Bible. Our former *Priscilla Papers* associate editor and now Ph.D. candidate Michal Beth Dinkler follows with an examination of submission in 1 Peter 3:1–6. Lynn Cohick applies our topic to the wider church today, meditating on the plight of Jephthah’s daughter as she contemplates the responses of Christian women in Africa whose lives have been limited by oppressive, hierarchical tradition. Her article reminds us that conclusions we reach on various issues like subjection do have serious consequences on the lives of others beyond our own circle—even strangers we may inadvertently influence. Médine Moussounga Keener then brings us a vivid picture of the horrid results of subjection on women in the Republic of Congo. Dawn Lindholm takes us traveling through Glen Scorgie’s *The Journey Back to Eden* (the time when “relational harmony between men and women” existed). This issue also introduces a new poet, Matthew Robert Erdel, who contributes a perceptive parable in verse. The touching photograph on the cover was taken by Sarah Beck several years ago in an orphanage in the Dominican Republic, and the beautiful photo on page 31 is by photographer John Tarantino.

Submission is a beautiful concept in the Bible, particularly when the context is mutual submission, the great equalizing of respect. It characterizes the way Jesus ordered leaders of the church to work with one another at the last supper—serving one another and the membership (John 13:14–15, cf. Mark 10:42–44). If this issue helps readers distinguish between willing submission and coerced subjection and assists you in avoiding the second, it will not only reach our goal for it, but will also give us joy.

Blessings,



New Lenses for Viewing Submission

J. MARTHA COMPLEMAN-BLAIR

Introduction

Jesus said, “If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light” (Matt. 6:22, Luke 11:34 RSV). Jesus also starkly commanded, “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out” (Matt. 18:9, Mark 9:47 KJV).

Jesus recognized that perception is governed by the lenses used. If the lens of our eye—our way of seeing—is pure, righteous, of the kingdom of God, we will have a pure, righteous, kingdom perspective. The “eye that offends”—causes sin—is a way of seeing that is neither pure nor righteous. The eye that offends has many lenses, multiple filters. The Christian church has used many of these flawed perspectives in looking at submission. Submission is a relationship issue, and righteousness is a matter of right relationships.

For the first forty years of my life and church experience, submission did not emerge as an issue in relationships between women and men. The churches of my experience were governed by elders chosen through a representative process. They led, the congregation followed, and individuals served where needed according to ability and interest. When I ventured into other parts of the body of Christ, the tension over submission was both a novelty and a puzzle to me. I had no “lens” at all for viewing submission. Only then did I realize that the Bible, and Paul’s letters in particular, speaks about submission. Only then did I begin to realize that this controversy over the translation and interpretation of Bible passages concerning submission was beginning to generate increasing amounts of valuable Bible scholarship. Much reading, study, and reflection has followed.

Even when we determine to examine and interpret Bible texts in the original languages, we often review the results with the eye that offends. Today, we have many Bible translations and paraphrases, but few Bible readers have the time or resources to research Bible texts in the original Hebrew or Greek. For those less academically inclined, the eye that offends can be used to take verses that support a certain point of view and extract them from a favorite translation with no regard to context or to the meaning of the words in the original language. God’s truth becomes obscured by warped and clouded lenses.

Here are some common lenses that warp our view of Scripture:

- Hierarchy—to consolidate and control power
- Chain of command—to regulate others’ behavior through organization
- Tradition—that values by prejudicially determined human status
- Culture—that values amorally according to fad and advertisement as well as human accomplishment
- Expediency—to reach a predetermined goal regardless of whether the text supports it
- Obedience—that measures compliance

Each eventually proves to be an eye that offends, leading to some imbalance or exploitation in relationships.

In contrast, the powerful lens of academic scholarship is essential and critical to how we view Scripture. With the efforts of excellent scholars of many theological traditions and both genders, this lens has been finely ground and minutely polished. I will refer briefly to some of this excellent work, but my hope is that my list and new lenses will help to move God’s truth regarding submission beyond the halls of academia to the often puzzled and frustrated believer in the pew.

Today, two of the most flagrant distortions of original language (Greek) concerning submission occur with Ephesians 5:18–22 and the parallel passage in Colossians 3:12–17. In both passages, Paul is writing about the way those who are followers of Jesus should relate to each other “in Christ.” The context of Paul’s writing preceding these passages and two key Greek words, *hupotassō* (to submit) and *kephalē* (head), deserve more careful attention. If we rid ourselves of the ways of seeing that cause offense and distort the truth of Scripture, what might we find in these passages pertaining to submission, while being mindful of the results of careful scholarship?

Following the flow of Paul’s discourse leading up to the first passage sheds important light on its meaning. Beginning in Ephesians 4, Paul begs his readers to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (vv. 1–3).¹ He expected all to “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (v. 13). Paul affirms and insists that his readers “must no longer live as the Gentiles [nations] live, in the futility of their minds” (v. 17). He reminds them they “were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (vv. 22–24). Continuing, Paul instructs them to put away falsehood, not to sin when angry, give up stealing, work honestly, let no evil talk come out of their mouths, and not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. They are to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling,

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slander, malice, and be kind to one another. They are to be tenderhearted, forgiving as God has forgiven them (vv. 25–31). In Ephesians 5, Paul exhorts them as God’s beloved children to live in love, as Christ has loved them (v. 1). They are to live as children of light (v. 8). They are to be careful how they live, and not get drunk with wine, but instead be filled with the Spirit (vv. 15, 18).

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul explains what makes the kind of living he describes possible: “being filled with the Spirit.” Maintaining such a lifestyle depends on being filled with the Holy Spirit, “with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption” (4:30). The “old self” cannot be filled with the Spirit. Only the new self, a new creation in Christ, can be filled with the Spirit. After explaining that the Spirit is the key to righteous living, Paul then sums up all of his instruction for right relationships with “Be subject [submitted] to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). Being filled with the Spirit, we are to be mutually subject, or submitted (*hupotassō*), to one another. In using the reflexive form of *hupotasso* to indicate reciprocal action, Paul is introducing a new concept. He is proposing a new paradigm for submission—one that is to be out of fear or reverence for Christ.²

In continuation of this thought, Paul then moves to specific examples in the home, where this new paradigm will be put into practice. He begins with the phrase “The wives to their husbands, as to the Lord, because. . . .” The verb *hupotassō* is absent; it is implied from the preceding sentence. Many translations make an arbitrary and unnatural break and even insert a heading between these two sentences. This tends to disconnect this exhortation from all that has gone before.

Hupotassō is also used in Colossians 3:18: “Wives be subject [submit] to your husbands.” As in Ephesians, the preceding verses (2:8 to 3:17) have described what constitutes living as “God’s chosen, holy and beloved” (3:12) in relationship with one another. Paul reminds the Colossians that they have died to the old nature (2:20). This section ends with “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (v. 17). Living in the kind of relationships Paul describes is done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

The verb *hupotassō* and Paul’s unique and deliberate usage in the context of mutuality have received extensive scholarly attention in recent years. Gilbert Bilezikian, writing on Ephesians in *Beyond Sex Roles*, makes the point that “the addition to ‘being submitted’ of the reciprocal pronoun ‘to each other’ changes its meaning entirely. ‘Being subject to one another’ is a very different relationship from ‘being subject to the other.’”³ He uses a military example and states, “Being subject to one another is only possible among equals.”⁴ Susan C. Hyatt’s consideration of *hupotassō* in her study of submission makes reference to its use in the sense of “being brought into a sphere of influence”⁵ with which one identifies and coming into unity. She further explores its use within the context of household codes of the time. Patricia Gundry gives

a clear and extended explanation of *hupotassō* as a call to self-volitional submission to achieve unity and equality in Greek hierarchical society.⁶

J. Lee Grady, in his *25 Tough Questions about Women in the Church*,⁷ makes yet another point: that *hupotassō* can also be translated “be attached to.” What kind of implication does this give to “be subject to”? I believe that Paul had in mind that we are members together of Christ’s body, in which we are bound or at-

*H**upotassō* can also be translated “be attached to.” What kind of implication does this give to “be subject to”? I believe that Paul had in mind that we are members together of Christ’s body, in which we are bound or attached together by Christ’s love in mutual submission.

tached together by Christ’s love in mutual submission. The witness to God’s work of redemption rests upon our mutual submission in the righteous relationships that Paul has described in great detail. Living or walking “in the light” keeps the body of Christ healthy, strong, and effective in witnessing to the world. The world needs to see God’s love in action through righteous relationships. This gives honor

and reverence to Christ.

Ephesians 5:22, which begins, “The wives to their husbands,” continues, “because the man is the head of woman as Christ head of the church” (v. 23, my literal trans.). The Greek word for “head,” *kephalē*, is the same word used in writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:3. We have many examples of how *kephalē* was used in Jesus’ time that reveal it was often used to indicate “source,” and seldom used to identify a ruling authority requiring the compliance of someone of less authority.⁸ Paul is saying, in effect, “God is the source of Christ; Christ is the source of man; man is the source of woman.”

I was first introduced to the scholarship beginning to emerge in the controversy over submission through a paper on *kephalē* distributed in a seminary class in the early 1980s. It was by Catherine and Richard Kroeger, who have continued to make contributions to this area of study. In *Equal to Serve*, Gretchen Gabelein Hull includes in Appendix III an article by Catherine Kroeger, “The Classical Concept of Head as ‘Source.’”⁹ It serves as a brief historical overview and summary. Most recently, the debate has been summed up by Alan Johnson in the article “A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of ‘Head’ (*Kephale*) in Paul’s Writings.”¹⁰

Paul’s examination of submission between husband and wife in Ephesians 5 includes a description of Christ’s sacrificial and sanctifying love for the church and God’s plan that the man leave his father and mother to be joined with (attached in love to) his wife. It ends with “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband” (v. 33). I believe that Paul is indicating that the man who does not love his wife as Christ loves the church fails in his witness to Christ. Christ is not honored or revered when this happens. Likewise, the woman who does not respect her husband in the mutual submission that Paul has so beautifully described in Ephesians 4–5 and Colossians 3 dishonors her source(s).

George Matheson, the blind Scottish preacher and hymn writer, saw the need for true lenses a century ago. In his devo-

tional book *Voices of the Spirit* he writes, “When the Spirit comes the old words will come to thee as something new. . . .” He prays:

The wonders are in Thy law already; they do not need to be put there. But until Thou comest my eyes are in want of a lens by which to see them. Light up the old texts, irradiate the time-worn phrases, deepen the by-gone meanings, revise the inadequate readings, reveal the latent application, unlock the hidden doors. I shall find the treasures in my earthen vessels when Thou has made known the words of the Lord.”¹¹

Now that we have examined Scripture itself and briefly considered the highly polished lens of academic scholarship, what are some of the other lenses for viewing submission that the Spirit might use for the benefit of Christ’s body?

1. The essentiality of equality

It is impossible to submit what you do not have. If you are outranked, outclassed, and outperformed, you acknowledge an inferior status. When I say, “You do it; you are better at it,” that statement can be shown to be true or untrue by measuring the two parties’ levels of competence. Recognizing a level of competence is not the same as submission.

Submission is the setting aside of something of equal or greater value. When I can do a task as well as you, but say, “You do it; I want you to have the pleasure (or honor, or experience),” or, if I give up a comparable opportunity in order for you to have a chance, that is submission. When I give you opportunity, place, position, or recognition that I could legitimately claim as mine, I have submitted mine in favor of yours.

Every person’s will—the ability to choose, decide, and determine action—is equally valuable. Being required, manipulated, or coerced to acknowledge an inferiority that is not true is subjection, exploitation, subordination, or compliance. It is not submission.

The apostle Paul, who wrote, “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21), elsewhere stated, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28 NIV), and “In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (Col. 3:11). Yielding to the will of another is godly submission only when equality in Christ is acknowledged.

2. Reciprocal responsibility in relationships

Astonishing statements by Jesus about his relationship with the Father appear in the fifth chapter of John’s gospel: “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; . . . Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. . . . I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment

is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:19, 20, 21, 30).

Here let us focus not on Jesus. We already know he was perfectly submissive to the Father. Let us look at the Father! Jesus sees and hears what he is doing. How? “The Father . . . shows him all that he himself is doing” (v. 20). Why? “The Father loves the Son . . .” (v. 20). What does this mean? The Father completely reveals himself to the Son. Jesus says, “As I hear, I judge” (v. 30). The Father reveals all and tells all to the Son.

What does this tell us about submission? First, the one to whom submission is given takes the initiative. The initiative is not a demand, not a command, not the stating of a requirement. The

The Father voluntarily reveals and discloses the very essence of his being. Father God opens himself up and invites knowing, in a relationship of love and trust. This is the context that calls for submission by the Son.

Father voluntarily reveals and discloses the very essence of his being. Father God opens himself up and invites knowing, in a relationship of love and trust. This is the context that calls for submission by the Son.

Secondly, submission is not given in blind mindless compliance. Submission is receiving—seeing and hearing in love—that which is voluntarily disclosed and revealed, and responding in kind. The submission and obedience of the Son depend upon and match the complete disclosure, revelation, and vulnerability of the Father. Submission is given and received in a relationship of complete mutual knowing. The complete knowing eliminates any hierarchy of power in the Godhead. The response of the Son by the Spirit finds its affirmation in the Father by the same Spirit. Through the Son, the Father is revealing and disclosing himself by the same Spirit to us.

With partial knowledge, we can respond, adapt, accommodate, adjust, support, enable, defer to, honor, go along with, comply, and even obey, but true submission can only be as deep as the knowing. In this context of knowing and being known, a husband and wife are to be in submission, to love sacrificially, and to honor one another. How many of those who demand “submission” from others are willing to be fully known to receive that submission in the righteousness of God?

3. The freedom of fellowship

Once we accept the New Testament message of equality in Christ, we are freed from the bondage of other systems of human relationships. Jesus’ disciples had difficulty accepting equality in Christ. At the Last Supper, “[a] dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, ‘The Kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves’” (Luke 22:24–27). Earlier, Jesus had said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31–32). An important aspect of the truth that frees is that kingdom relationships are not governed by Greek philosophy’s great chain of being or by a societal chain of command.¹² These place us either in a hierarchy or on a ladder, with someone above

us and someone below us. It is true that the successful execution of a project or program may require a chain of command for the delegation of tasks and responsibilities. The problem with ladders is that those who see themselves “below” can become frantic to force themselves higher, while those who perceive themselves “above” fear falling lower. In the resulting scramble, many are trampled, many are wounded, and some are lost. Neither hierarchical position nor ladders governs our relationships in the kingdom of God. Equality in Christ delivers us from territoriality, defensiveness, or having to justify displacing others.

Again, it is helpful to remember that we are part of Christ’s body. Each part contributes to the whole. The hand’s value is the same whether it is reaching overhead or into a hole. The heart’s function is as necessary when lying down as when running. Each cell contributes to and participates in the life of the entire body. Blood cells, nerve cells, lymph cells, and skin cells all have specific and individual functions—not on a ladder of ascending importance, but in a wonderful and complex interrelationship and interdependence.

In Christ’s body, we should be free to be submissive in fellowship without fear of being displaced or dishonored, free to be known without being overcome or overruled, free to know without being a threat, and free to explore our individual and collective identities as unique and precious parts of Christ’s body. We are free to receive the gifts that the Spirit of God wants to impart to us for the blessing of the body. With Paul, we can rejoice to share “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:13).

4. The mutual accountability of submission

To be submissive is to make oneself accountable. If you submit to my leadership, I can call you to account. But more than that, if I receive your submission, I am accountable to our Father for you. I assume a responsibility for you, for your obedience.

I need you to call me to account also. I may need you to remind me of my accountability. If I demand more than submission in equality, I need you to say, “If I yield to you in doing this which I feel is contrary to God’s will, are you prepared to stand for me in judgment and say, ‘Lord, I required this of my sister?’” If I still require of you that which is not God’s will, then your obedience as a Christian is to God, not me. Submission is not the surrender of your will to mine. Obedience to higher law is not rebellion, though some may see it so. The Jewish temple authorities, whom Jesus’ disciples would ordinarily obey in religious matters, ordered them not to “speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Their response is instructive: “Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19). Rebellion is not the opposite of submission. Rebellion is the opposite of obedience. The opposite of submission is lack of unity, lack of trust, detachment, separation, and divorcement. In Christ, when submission within a relationship becomes disobedience to God, then submission must give way to obedience to God.

The writer of Hebrews urges, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy, and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you” (Heb. 13:17). For the body of our Lord to function fully, both submission and obedience are needed. There are relationships to maintain, attitudes to keep pure, and tasks to be accomplished. Our witness will be most effective when we are submitted and accountable to one another in obedience to God together.

5. The law of love

Paul wrote to the Philippians of Jesus:

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
But emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human likeness,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:6–11)

Submission is a temporary and reciprocal relinquishment of rights. Christ the Son, in submission to the Father, laid down his glory and dominion in heaven to come into time to be born as a baby. In full agreement with the Father, he accepted the limitations of the human condition. He submitted himself to obey the Father, and the Father kept and confirmed his sonship. If he had sold out to Satan (abdication) or surrendered to the flesh (abandonment), that which he had laid down in submission would have been lost. In the equality, trust, total knowing, love, and accountability of the Godhead, all was kept to be restored. Jesus could lay down this earthly life in total faith that the power of a greater restoration was secure in the Father. In the law of love, submission plus obedience plus sacrifice not only provided for the restoration of that which had been submitted, but more. The revelation of God was expanded. New life became available for humanity.

That which is submitted in agreement to an equal can be fully restored by the receiver. The functioning of the human body provides a rough analogy. The leg muscles can temporarily relinquish blood supply to the digestive system in order to process food. When the work of digestion and storage has been completed, not only is the blood released for other body use, but

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new stores of energy are available for both blood and muscles. Life has increased.

As members of the body of Christ, we can submit and sacrifice—in him—and trust the law of love.

Conclusion

Jesus warned his followers of the dangers of the “eye” or lenses that we might use to regard God’s truth. The New Testament, which proclaims the gospel of redemption from sin and the reign of Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God, presents us with new concepts for relationships and for the ordering of human society. Mutual submission is one of the concepts that has been viewed through an assortment of lenses, including tradition, culture, status, hierarchy, organization, expediency, matters of competence, compliance, or obedience. It is time to use new lenses in order to obtain an accurate view of God’s truth.

Humanly speaking, mutual submission is that expression of relinquishment of rights and power that keeps relationships right between those of equal will and value. They are willing in love to be fully known, vulnerable, and accountable to one another. It is righteousness—that is, keeping relationships right. This righteousness, expressed through mutual submission, contains the very essence of eternal life: knowing God (John 17:3), knowing as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12), and knowing and being known by one another.

Notes

1. Scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.
2. Bruce C. E. Fleming makes a careful and detailed explanation of Paul’s new thesis in his pamphlet *Submission Book 5* of his Think Again About the Bible series (Self-published, 2003), 27–39.
3. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 154.
4. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 154.
5. Susan Hyatt, *In the Spirit We’re Equal* (Dallas, Tex.: Hyatt International Ministries, 1998), 256–59.
6. Patricia Gundry, *Heirs Together* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Suitcase Books, 1999), 94–96.
7. J. Lee Grady, *25 Tough Questions about Women in the Church* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2003), 22.
8. See, for example, Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Toward an Understanding of Ancient Conceptions of ‘Head,’” *Priscilla Papers* 20:3 (Summer 2006), 4–8.
9. Gretchen Gabelein Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1988), 267ff.
10. Alan E. Johnson, “A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of ‘Head’ (*Kephalē*) in Paul’s Writings,” *Priscilla Papers* 20:4 (Autumn 2006), 21–29.
11. George Matheson, *Voices of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 57–58.
12. For discussion, see Letha Dawson Scanzoni, “The Great Chain of Being and the Chain of Command,” in *Women’s Spirit Bonding*, ed. Janet Kalven and Mary I. Buckley (New York, N.Y.: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), 41–55.

Sarah's Submission: Peter's Analogy in 1 Peter 3:5–6

MICHAL BETH DINKLER

Introduction

In chapter 3 of his first letter, Peter¹ draws an analogy between Christian wives of the first century and the Old Testament matriarch Sarah. This directive (1 Peter 3:5–6) subsequently has been used to support the view that, universally, every woman “should submit to her husband as she submits to the Lord.”² On the other hand, some scholars hold that this passage simply “reinforc[es a] dominant patriarchal system and phallocentric mindset” and should be rejected altogether as oppressive to women.³ How are we to understand Peter’s charge? Is this a universal, divinely inspired mandate for hierarchical marriage relationships? Or is Peter hopelessly patriarchal and irrelevant? In fact, Peter’s rhetoric points to an entirely different conclusion: Peter advocates qualified submission to non-Christians in order to be a witness for Christ’s self-sacrifice.

The passage states literally:

- v. 1: In the same way, wives, submitting to your own husbands, in order that also, if they are unbelievers of the word, by the conduct of the wives, without a word, they will be won over,
- v. 2: having seen your reverent and pure conduct.
- v. 3: (Let) it not be the outer adornment, the braiding of hair and wearing of gold or putting on of garments,
- v. 4: but the hidden person of the heart, in the immortality⁴ of the gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great value in the sight of the Lord.
- v. 5: For in this way formerly also the holy women, the ones hoping in God, were adorning themselves (by) submitting to their own husbands,
- v. 6: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, of whom you will be made children if you continue doing good and not being made afraid by any fear.⁵

Women in the Greco-Roman world

In 3:1, we read that, in this section, Peter directly addresses the *gunaikes*, or “wives.” However, he is not addressing all wives; he qualifies his address by speaking particularly to wives of “unbelievers/those who disobey the word” (*apeithousin tō logō*).⁶ This point is crucial to understanding Peter’s directive to wives in 3:1–7, because his primary purpose is evangelistic: he instructs his readers to endure so that unbelievers might “be gained/won over” (*kerdēthēsontai*).

In order to appreciate Peter’s instructions to Christian wives, one must understand that the place of women in first-century Greco-Roman society often made conversion to Christianity a dangerous undertaking. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman women were expected to obey the *paterfamilias*, the “father of the family.”

These highest ranking males legally could “‘throw out’ babies, resort to prostitutes and make life miserable for their wives.”⁷ Still, because of their superior social status, husbands “had more to lose socially from conversion to an unpopular minority religion,” and, accordingly, “Christianity spread faster among wives than husbands.”⁸

Even more germane to our text is the fact that a wife was expected to worship her husband’s god(s), or face the charge of atheism.⁹ Thus reads Plutarch’s assertion: “It is becoming for a wife to worship and know only the gods that her husband believes in.”¹⁰ Furthermore, for wives to reject “the family religion determined by their husband would be more public, as well as more intimate,” and would be particularly threatening to fathers, because “wives were responsible for raising children for the first period of the children’s lives.”¹¹

Mosaic law testifies to the low social status of Jewish women as well.¹² Gilbert Bilezikian observes that “the Old Testament word for husband (*baal*) was also used for ‘master,’ ‘owner,’ and ‘lord,’” and that “the legal status of a married woman was that of a child in relation to the ruler of a house.”¹³ A woman’s low social status also made her economically dependent on her husband. In practical terms, this was a necessary, but not ideal, hierarchy. Thus, “Peter’s advice is practical, not harsh as it might sound in our culture. Although philosophers’ household codes often stressed that the wife should ‘fear’ her husband as well as submit to him, Peter disagrees (v. 6; cf. 3:13–14). . . . Christian wives were limited in their options, but Peter wants them to pursue peace without being intimidated.”¹⁴ Peter’s instruction was not only practical; it was also radical. As Campbell asserts, “Undoubtedly, the Christian wives to whom Peter writes have virtually no chance for an egalitarian marital arrangement. Yet for them to remain faithful Christians, maintaining their own religious identity . . . is quite revolutionary.”¹⁵

Here, we turn to Peter’s overall purpose: to exhort believers to glorify God in suffering, so others will be encouraged to glorify God. David Balch reminds us that the household codes in 1 Peter perform an “apologetic function,” since “the lack of submission of wives to their husbands would be a source of slander or blasphemy against Christianity.”¹⁶ However, Balch also reaches the untenable conclusion that Peter is advocating total “acculturation to Roman society.”¹⁷ Campbell disagrees with Balch, and yet he also

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draws a problematic conclusion; he argues that, in this instance, Peter “agrees with the morality of the larger Greco-Roman culture.”¹⁸ On the contrary, Peter does not admonish wives to reject their Christian faith, nor to merge their husbands’ religion(s) with Christianity, both of which could entail either acculturation or endorsement of those cultural values. Instead, Peter tells the women to remain committed completely to their faith and committed completely to their husbands.

The complications involved in a wife’s conversion, as well as admonitions to avoid being “unequally yoked,”¹⁹ may have led Christian women to contemplate leaving their unbelieving husbands. Yet, Peter does not advise Christian women to reject their pagan husbands because he is concerned about the survival of the women and the salvation of the men. The husbands are to be “won over” (*kerdēthēsontai*) by their wives’ good “conduct” (*anastrophēs*).²⁰

Wider literary context: Sarah and Abraham

Umberto Eco rightly observes that “no text is read independently of the reader’s experience of other texts.”²¹ Intertextual frames inform the way we understand a specific text; a text’s immediate literary context, as well as its general literary context, provide clues to which we refer when we are filling textual gaps and resolving textual ambiguities.

In our text, Peter is drawing an analogy between first-century Christian women and the Old Testament figure of Sarah. Even in the first century, Sarah, first named Sarai,²² carries authority, since, “together with Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, [Sarah] was deemed in Judaism to be one of the four mothers of the chosen people.”²³ The author of Hebrews commends Sarah because she received the power to conceive “in faith” (*pistei*).²⁴

Because Peter makes a specific reference to the Old Testament, determining the text to which he refers is essential to understanding his intention. At a cursory glance, it might seem tenable that 1 Peter 3:6 (“calling him ‘lord’”) refers to the only instance in Scripture in which Sarah literally calls Abraham her “lord.”²⁵ Genesis 18:12: “And Sarah laughed in her inward part, saying, ‘After I am worn out, will delight come about for me, (even) when my lord is old?’”²⁶ However, this verse does not occur in a context of obedience. Genesis 18 tells the story of Sarah overhearing the “three men” (*anashim sheloshah*) proclaim to Abraham that she will give birth to a son. Presumably, Sarah “obeys” Abraham by baking cakes as he tells her to do in 18:6 (though we never hear of them again), but, by 18:12, the scene has changed. She is now hiding at the door of the tent.²⁷ Abraham is not directing her in any way; he is not even aware that she is there.²⁸

As Aída Besançon Spencer notes, “a superficial understanding of 1 Peter . . . does not fit Genesis 18:12 or Sarah’s personality or characteristic behavior.”²⁹ Spencer concludes that Genesis 12:11–20 and 20:6–9 “[fit] Peter’s context better.”³⁰ These narratives are examples of what Robert Alter refers to as “scene-types,” repeating stories that develop common themes in biblical narrative, such as the several times “a patriarch is driven by famine to a southern region where he pretends that his wife is his sister.”³¹

In Genesis 12 and 20, Sarah actually does obey Abraham. However, in these instances, Abraham is no God-fearing, selfless husband. He “disowns the beautiful Sarai as wife, calls her his sister, and allows Pharaoh [and Abimelech] to use her, thereby ensuring his own survival, even his prosperity.”³² In fact, at the time of these stories, Abraham is “an example of a husband disobedient to the word.”³³ Though Abraham initially obeys God and leaves his home in faith,³⁴ he does not trust that God will protect him in accordance with God’s promise; instead, he takes matters into his own hands at the expense of his wife. For this reason, he is held culpable and Sarah is excupated.³⁵

Peter does not refer to Abraham and Sarah because Abraham is a model husband; quite to the contrary. Abraham is an example of the husband in 1 Peter 3:1 “who does not believe/obey the word.” Nor does Peter cite these Genesis stories because Abraham holds a perpetual superior position over Sarah. Rather, “Sarah’s case was cited in full knowledge of the fact that Abraham pointedly obeyed his wife as often as she obeyed him, once even under God’s specific command (Gen. 16:2, 6; 21:11–12).”³⁶

Sarah and Abraham are a fitting example for Peter’s audience in 1 Peter 3 because, in many ways, Sarah’s situation paralleled that of first-century women. As David Wheaton writes, because “the domestic economy depended on the husband earning a living for the family, it was natural that the wife should look to him to make decisions concerning where they should live etc. Sarah’s readiness to go with Abraham in obedience to God’s call is an example of this kind of relationship.”³⁷ The dangers inherent in a first-century woman’s conversion to Christianity also are analogous to the perils faced by Sarah, misrepresenting herself in a foreign ruler’s palace; nevertheless, Sarah courageously “chose to save her husband’s life.”³⁸

Most importantly, Peter presents Sarah as a “Christ-like example” because she is “willing to suffer vicariously” for her husband.³⁹ Even when Abraham disobeys God, Sarah obeys Abraham, selflessly offering herself in order (potentially) to save the life of her husband. This is the very task to which Peter calls believing Christian wives.

The book of 1 Peter: themes and style

The most prominent theme in 1 Peter is that of living for Christ in the midst of persecution and suffering. To Peter, there are two intimately related reasons for persevering with faith in Christ. Christians’ *motivation* is the gospel of God’s salvation for believers, and their *purpose* is evangelistic: they should exemplify Christ for unbelievers, thereby silencing critics and, ultimately, winning them to Christ through holy conduct.

Secondary themes in 1 Peter are related to the main foci above. As he elaborates about what “holy conduct” entails, Peter speaks of growing in salvation (2:1–5), of appropriate behavior outside (2:11–17) and inside the household (2:18–3:12), and of “shepherding” God’s flock (5:1–4).

The book of 1 Peter is written in a sophisticated Greek style. Peter makes frequent use of Old Testament quotations and allusions,⁴⁰ and he uses the rhetorical techniques of comparison,⁴¹

anaphora (the repetition of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences or clauses),⁴² polysyndeton (the repetition of conjunctions in close succession),⁴³ asyndeton (the omission of conjunctions),⁴⁴ and unique vocabulary.⁴⁵

In addition, 1 Peter is replete with examples of figurative speech, and 3:5–6 is no exception. Here, Peter draws an analogy⁴⁶ between Christian women and Sarah, using the conjunction *ōs*

("like/as").⁴⁷ The analogy is a form of authorial commentary and is apt for several reasons. Just as Sarah courageously "obeyed" Abraham even when he did not trust God, so wives of unbelievers can "obey" their husbands, thus honoring the established marital hierarchy (2:13) with courage (*mē phoboumenai mēdemian ptoēsīn*). Just as Sarah entered dangerous situations by being taken as a ruler's wife, so Christian women entered potentially dangerous situations by converting without their husbands' consent. Just as Sarah discerned when to obey Abraham and when to speak her mind, so wives of unbelievers should be judicious about when to obey their husbands. Nevertheless, all tropes are limited; one should not indiscriminately extrapolate such comparisons, neither in every sense, nor into all cultures across time.

Peter also uses figurative language to describe women "adorn-ing themselves" (*kosmeō*) with immaterial qualities. This image conveys intentional choice, since we deliberately clothe ourselves. Clothing is the outer layer people see when they look at us. In the same way, Peter advises Christians to exemplify godly qualities, so that these are what people observe when they see them. Here, Peter echoes "dressing/clothing" language that also is used in other New Testament texts, namely by Paul and Jesus.⁴⁸

Immediate literary context: Peter's three examples

First Peter 3:5–6 is embedded in the larger set of instructions for women to "(let) [your beauty] not be that which is outside, the braiding of hair and wearing of gold or putting on of garments of the world, but the hidden person of the heart, in the immortality of the gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great value in the sight of the Lord." Here, Peter employs a negative/positive comparison ("not this . . . but that . . .") to highlight that one's greatest witness for Christ is not outer adornment, but, rather, one's inner spirit.

The command governing this section of the letter, to "submit to human authorities for the Lord's sake,"⁴⁹ should be read in light of that which directly precedes it: "Have your good conduct among the Gentiles, in order that in the slander-ing (of you) as criminals, *from seeing your good works, they may praise the Lord in the day of visitation.*"⁵⁰ It makes sense that, with this evangelistic purpose in mind, Peter would offer contemporary illustrations of "human authorities" to demonstrate his basic principle.

The example of wives' submission to husbands is bracketed by two other examples relevant to hierarchical first-century society: the right behavior of slaves (2:18–20) and husbands (3:7). The progression of examples mirrors the hierarchy to which Peter refers: he addresses slaves (considered inferior to both wives and hus-

bands), then wives (considered superior to slaves, but inferior to husbands), then husbands (the position of authority considered superior to both slaves and wives). Some scholars make much of the fact that Peter does not tell husbands to "submit" to their wives, but rather to "be considerate/caring" of them and "treat them with respect" (3:7). However, because *paterfamiliae* represent the top level of authority, it would not make sense for Peter to

tell them literally to "submit" to anyone; there is no one above them in the first-century domestic chain of authority.⁵¹

Essentially, the succession of examples is used as a synecdoche: an example from each major class in society serves to illustrate that all Christians, in every

stratum of society, must submit to and honor one another as witnesses for Christ. Peter underscores the inclusivity of the command to submit in 3:8: "all" (*pantes*) "live in harmony with one another. . . ." This fact alone indicates that 3:1–7 is not meant to be a literal, universal injunction for marital hierarchy,⁵² since such a view takes the passage out of its biblical context.

In fact, such societal, authoritarian hierarchies have no place in the church, as Paul reminds the Galatians: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:28 NRSV). Paul also admonishes husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21 that they should be "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (*Hupotassomenio allēlois en phobō Christou*).

Grammar and semantics

Peter's grammatical choices also reflect his theological message. First Peter 3:5–6 is integrated into the larger unit of thought found in 3:1–6. Peter uses Sarah as an example to illustrate what has gone before—his admonitions for wives. Though 3:1 is the first verse to address wives directly, the initial *Homoiōs* ("likewise" or "in the same way") indicates that Peter is linking the direction that follows with an earlier instruction; the reader must refer back to Peter's last directive, which we find in 2:18: "Slaves, submit yourselves (*hupotassomenoi*) in all reverence to the masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the crooked." This instruction, however, should be viewed as a specific example of the general command that went before: "Honor all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king" (2:17).⁵³ First Peter 2:17, in turn, refers back to the command in 2:13 to "be subject (*hupotassō*) to every human authority." Thus, "submit" (*hupotassō*) is the only finite verb from 2:13–16 until we reach the string of imperatives in 2:17 (*timaō*, "honor," and *agapaō*, "love"), and these two verbs should not be taken as a new line of thought. Peter employs them as synonyms for *hupotassō*, effectually equating *hupotassō* with intentionally choosing to respect others by loving them and fearing God.

Next, slaves are cited as a particular example, but verses 2:19–25 expound the conditions of everyone's submission:⁵⁴ the situations in which they should suffer (even in unjust circumstances),⁵⁵ the reason they should suffer unjustly (because Christ

suffered unjustly, setting an example for believers),⁵⁶ and the way they should suffer (with no deceit or retaliation, trusting in God).⁵⁷

When readers encounter the adverbial *homoïōs* in 3:1, they know this refers generally to the entire foregoing section, and, specifically, to the main instruction in verse 17. Peter employs *homoïōs* as a linking adverb twice in this section: 3:1 (linking the guidelines for slaves with the guidelines for wives), and 3:7 (joining the instructions to wives with the instructions to husbands).⁵⁸ Not until 3:8 does Peter indicate closure to this unit of thought: *to telos* (the end/finally). Thus, the verses from 2:18 to 3:8 make up a connected series that is subordinate to 2:17, which is itself an elaboration of 2:13.

In our text, 1 Peter 3:5, we enter into the middle of a sentence that began in 3:1 and continues the thought unit beginning in 2:13: “Be subject to every human authority on account of the Lord.” The dominating verb, *hupotassō*,⁵⁹ has been hotly contested among complementarian and egalitarian interpreters of Scripture.⁶⁰ Most important for our discussion is Peter’s use of the word elsewhere in this letter (see above). Even Peter’s use of *hupotassō* in reference to slaves (2:18) implies choice on the slaves’ part, since only two verses earlier (2:16) Peter orders them to live as *eleutheroi* (“free people”). Thus, in each of his injunctions to “submit” (*hupotassō*),⁶¹ Peter advocates “qualified submission,” because, in reality, “[Christians] are not really part of the structures of the present age.”⁶² Furthermore, Peter emphasizes that submission is a means of following Christ, who voluntarily underwent suffering.

Peter’s use of *hupotassomenai* in 3:5 could be viewed as a result participle or a means participle, but, either way, the intention of the woman is assumed because of the reflexive sense of the prior uses of *hupotassomenai* in 3:1 and 2:13. In fact, *hupotassō* never occurs in the New Testament in the active voice, which would signify imposing submission on another; it always connotes a shared decision, or intentionally submitting oneself to another. For instance, whenever Paul instructs children to obey their parents and slaves to obey their masters, he uses the imperative form of *hupakouō*, or “obey.”⁶³ In Paul’s parallel commands to wives,⁶⁴ he communicates a mutual decision of reciprocal submission by substituting the word *hupotassō*. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word *hupakouō* carries no reflexive connotation⁶⁵ and often is used to indicate obedience to the gospel and/or God.⁶⁶

In light of the foregoing discussion, are we to understand Peter’s use of the word *hupakouō* in verse 6 to mean that Sarah “obeyed” Abraham as a child would her parents, or as a slave would his master? In order to answer this question, the interpreter must return to the Old Testament, which Peter is referencing. In actuality, the Hebrew never directly states that Sarah “obeys” Abraham, and the Septuagint never uses the word *hupakouō* to describe her. In fact, the only time the word *hupakouō* is used in relation to Abraham is in Genesis 16:2 (*hupakousen*), and,

there, Abraham is “obeying” Sarah. Thus, Peter’s use of the word *hupakouō* clearly cannot refer to a universal stipulation for wives to “obey” their husbands as children would their parents or as slaves would their masters.

Suddenly, Peter uses a metaphor that would have been stunning to many in a first-century audience. The word *agathopoiousai* in 3:6 is a present active conditional participle. Thus, Peter

says that, if wives keep “doing good,” they will become the “children” (*tekna*) of Sarah. Essentially, they will become her heirs, inheriting the promises Sarah received from God, just as men were considered the heirs of Abraham’s faith. In this culminating phrase addressed to wives of unbelievers, “spiritual heredity

is traced from foremother to daughter,” a highly unusual image in the first century.⁶⁷

Contemporary application

As we have seen, Peter’s purpose in 1 Peter 3:5–6 is to present an example of effective witness to non-Christians that applies in his culture, not to endorse marital or social hierarchy for all time. Craig Keener avers that the only reason “Peter upholds societal norms” in certain instances, such as slavery and marital hierarchy, is “for the purpose of the church’s witness in society.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, Peter seeks to focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ⁶⁹ rather than on “unnecessarily divisive behaviors.”⁷⁰ Thus, Keener concludes:

[Peter’s] sympathy here is clearly with the woman, as it was with the slaves in 2:18–25. He continues to advocate submission to authority for the sake of witness and silencing charges that Christianity is subversive.⁷¹

Though these particular hierarchical structures may not apply to our twenty-first century culture, Peter’s principle continues to be relevant. Any time Christians must endure opposition from non-Christians, especially from someone in a position of authority over them, Peter’s advice remains apropos.

As Davids writes, “Ironically, interpretations that focus on the unilateral obedience or submission of wives to husbands, regardless of cultural context, achieve the opposite of Peter’s intention. Rather than promoting harmony with culture . . . Christianity is perceived as undermining culture in a retrogressive way. This is precisely what 1 Peter is seeking to minimize.”⁷²

Notes

1. While I recognize that the authorship of 1 Peter is debated in some circles, in order to avoid cumbersome constructions, I use the name Peter to refer to the author of the epistle that bears his name.

2. George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, Ill.: Good News Publishers, 1991), 174.

3. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1992), 4.

4. In the Greek, there is no noun here. The adjective *aphthartō* (imperishable/immortal) is used substantivally. Because there is no exact English equivalent, English translations employ the words “beauty” (NIV, NIB, ESV, NAB, NRS), “quality” (NAS), “ornament” (KJV), or “jewel” (RSV). I have chosen the word “immortality” to convey the sense of the substantival adjective.
5. My original translation. All biblical citations are my translations unless otherwise noted.
6. Wayne Grudem, who argues that Peter is mandating the universal, unilateral submission of women to the authority of men, nevertheless remarks that in this passage, “Those who ‘do not believe the word’ are husbands who are unbelievers; the present tense verb (*apeithousin*) suggests a pattern of life characterized by unbelief or rejection not only of the gospel but also of God’s standards in other areas of life.” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 202.
7. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993; CD-ROM: Logos Digital Library System, 2003). Keener cites an example from the second century in which “a Christian divorced her husband for his repeated infidelity, so he betrayed her to the authorities as a Christian.”
8. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.
9. “Cults that forbade their participation in Roman religious rites, including prohibiting worship of a family’s household gods, were viewed with disdain, and Jewish or Christian women who refused to worship these gods could be charged with atheism.” Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. Even in early Christianity, we find examples where the male’s conversion to Christianity implies the conversion of the entire household: John 4:53; Acts 16:31–34, 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16; Heb. 11:7.
10. Quoted in Peter H. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage: 1 Peter 3:1–7,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed., ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 226.
11. Quoted in Davids, 234.
12. “The ancient Near East permitted the sale of girls to any male, whether domestic or foreign, and often for sexual purposes.” William J. Webb, “A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed., ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 389. Even in the Bible, we find that women were viewed as the property of men and were subject to the decisions of their fathers and husbands. For example, see Num. 30:1–16, Deut. 22:22, 28–29; 24:1–4. Whereas the virginity of a woman had to be proven (Deut. 22:13–19), that of a man did not; if the woman were found not to be a virgin, she would be stoned (Deut. 22:20–21). Whereas a woman caught in adultery was always stoned, a man caught in adultery was only to be stoned if he had slept with another man’s wife (Deut. 22:22–24).
13. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 63.
14. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.
15. Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter* (SBL Dissertation Series 160: 1998), 151.
16. David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBL Monograph Series 26:1981), 92.
17. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 93.
18. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, 125.
19. 2 Cor. 6:14.
20. 1 Pet. 3:1.
21. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations of the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1979), 12.
22. Gen. 11:29. God changes her name in Gen. 17:15.
23. Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 96.
24. Heb. 11:11.
25. The Hebrew word found in Gen. 18:12 is *adonai* (“lord/master”). In 1 Peter and the Septuagint, the word used is *kurios* (“lord/master/sir [of address]”). Most scholars agree that the word “lord” was used in ancient times as a term of respect, like “sir” (per Jacob to Esau in Gen. 33:13–14), and should not be taken as an indication that Sarah viewed Abraham as her literal “master.” For example, see Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 94.
26. As Hillyer writes, “The occasion . . . is when she reveals her incredulity that, despite their advanced years, she was to bear her husband a son (Gen. 18:12 LXX [Septuagint]). . . . Sarah’s response to Abraham on that occasion was an amused ‘My lord is rather old!’” Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 94. The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament also cites Gen. 18:12 as the reference. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 603.
27. 18:10.
28. See 18:9, where Abraham answers incorrectly when the men ask about Sarah’s location.
29. Aida Besançon Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10:1 (2000), 106.
30. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 106. See especially the chart of similarities between Genesis 12 and 1 Peter 3 (Table 1).
31. Isaac repeats his father’s contemptible behavior in Genesis 26. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1981), 47.
32. Phyllis Tribble, “Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah,” *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Alice Bach (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1999), 281.
33. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 108.
34. The author of Hebrews commends Abraham for this act of faith (11:8).
35. See Gen. 12:18; 20:9, 16.
36. Gilbert Bilezikian, “The Subordination Challenge #5,” *Priscilla Papers* 16:4 (Autumn 2002), 7.
37. David Wheaton, “1 Peter,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1378.
38. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 114.
39. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 113–144.
40. For example, see 1:10–12, 24–25; 2:6–8, 28; 3:5–6, 10–12, 20; 5:5, 7.
41. See the metaphors and similes in 1:14, 19, 23–24; 2:2, 4–8, 11, 25; 3:7; 5:2–3, 8.
42. Compare the use of the word *hupotassomenai* to begin clauses in 1 Pet. 3:1 and 3:5.
43. For example, see 1 Pet. 1:4, 7; 2:1; 3:22.
44. For instance, see 1 Pet. 2:9; 4:3.
45. There are sixty-two words in 1 Peter that occur nowhere else in the New Testament.
46. Richard Lanham defines analogy as “reasoning or arguing from parallel cases.” *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), 10.
47. Though this comparison uses the word “like/as,” it is not a simile, because a simile compares two unlike things.
48. For example, Christians will be clothed with power “from on high” (Luke 24:49), with immortality (1 Cor. 15:54), and with the armor of light (Rom. 13:12). See also Paul’s extended metaphor in Eph. 6.
49. 1 Pet. 2:13.
50. 1 Pet. 2:12 (italics added).
51. We must note that not all men were *paterfamiliae*; those who were not *paterfamiliae* remained answerable to their fathers.
52. Most biblical interpreters would not conclude that Peter is calling for a universal system of slavery, yet some view his next two examples as a call for a universal obedience of women to men.
53. Campbell categorizes all of the participles in 1 Pet. 2:18–3:12 as “circumstantial,” rather than imperatival. He writes, “They describe circumstances attendant to the imperative *pantas timēate* of 2:17.” *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, 123.

54. Verse 25 further supports the view that vv. 2:19–25 refer to all Christians, since v. 25 clearly is not directed solely at slaves: “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (NIV).

55. 3:19–20.

56. 3:21.

57. 3:22–25.

58. Peter’s final use of *homoiōs* is in 5:5 (connecting the imperatives for elder church leaders to the imperatives for young men).

59. The word *hupotassō* can mean “to cause to be in a submissive relationship, to subject, to subordinate,” or “to subject oneself,” often with “a sense of voluntary yielding in love.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG), ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1042. For example, see 1 Cor. 16:16, Eph. 5:21.

60. For the complementarian view, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991). For the egalitarian view, see Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

61. 2:18, 3:1.

62. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage,” 228 (italics added).

63. For example, see Col. 3:20, 22 and Eph. 6:1, 5. The word *hupakouō*

can mean “to follow instructions, obey, follow” as well as “to grant one’s request, hear,” and “to answer a knock at the door.” BDAG, 1029.

64. See Col. 3:18 and Eph. 5:21.

65. Romans 6:12, 16, 17 refer to the reign of sin in one’s life, which has no reflexive connotation. See also Luke 17:6, which implies no choice on the part of the *sukaminos* (“mulberry tree”) to obey.

66. Matt. 8:27, Mark 4:41, and Luke 8:25 refer to the wind and sea obeying Jesus, and Mark 1:27 describes the unclean spirits obeying Jesus. See also Acts 6:7; Rom. 10:16; Phil. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:8, 3:14; Heb. 5:9, 11:8.

67. Aída Besançon Spencer and Catherine Clark Kroeger, “1 Peter,” *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 787.

68. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.

69. Peter refers directly to the “proclamation of the gospel” twice (4:6, 17) and to “salvation” four times (1:5, 9, 10; 2:2). He names “Jesus Christ” nine times (1:1–3, 7, 13; 2:5; 3:21; 4:11), in addition to the “Spirit of Christ” (1:11), the “sufferings of Christ” (1:11; 2:21; 4:1, 13; 5:1), the “blood of Christ” (1:19), the “example” of Christ (2:21), the holiness of Christ (3:15), their “good behavior in Christ” (3:16), the “name of Christ” (4:14), God’s “eternal glory in Christ” (5:10), and to his readers as being “in Christ” (5:14).

70. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage,” 234.

71. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.

72. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage,” 236.

APPENDIX: LESSON PLAN

This lesson plan is intended for late high school- and college-aged Christian students, but readers are invited to adapt it for the needs of their specific groups. The room should be arranged with circular tables, around which students will discuss in groups. Generally, the lesson is designed to take the students on a “journey”—beginning with their current understanding of the passage (and, concomitantly, the issues it addresses), back in time to Peter’s first-century audience, further back into the Genesis narratives of Sarah, and, finally, returning to “present day” to reexamine their understanding of the issues. The specific goals of the study include the following:

- To teach students the meaning of this passage in particular (especially as it relates to men and women) and thereby to impact their actions in the world as witnesses for Christ.
- To model the responsible use of historical, social, and linguistic backgrounds in the discernment of Scripture.
- To challenge students to think critically about the issues raised, in interaction with each other and the text.

Introduction: preconceptions (15 minutes total)

- At each table, students brainstorm together the messages they have heard about relationships between men and women (from any source—parents, media, church, friends, books, etc.)
- Each table shares with the larger group to compile one large list of preconceptions.
- Read 1 Peter 3:1–7 as a group.

- Around the tables, each group determines what this passage seems to be saying about the marriage relationship.
- Each table shares with the larger group. How similar or different is this list from the one you made previously? Take note of what makes you uncomfortable and/or confused.

Then and now: 1 Peter 3:5–6

Then: Stepping into the shoes of Peter’s readers
(15 minutes total)

The leader gives a short introductory synopsis of key background information (5 minutes).

Discuss the following as a table (10 minutes):

- Who is Peter’s audience in this passage?
- What is the place of each person listed in 1 Peter 2–3 (slave, wife, husband) in the domestic order of Peter’s first-century audience?
- How do you think each of these people would have reacted to Peter’s directions in 1 Peter 2 and 3?
- Imagine you are a Christian wife and your husband worships other gods. How do you feel? What do you want to do? Do you have children? How does that affect your thoughts?
- Imagine you are a non-Christian husband and your wife becomes a Christian. She wants to teach your children that Christianity is right. What do you think and feel? What do you want to do? How do you act?

- Why do you think Peter advises women to obey their non-Christian husbands?

Stepping into the shoes of Sarah (15 minutes total)

The leader gives a short introductory synopsis of key background information (5 minutes).

Together as a table, do the following (10 minutes):

- Read the passages about Sarah in Genesis 12, 18, and 20.
- Determine the passage(s) to which Peter is most likely referring. (Does Sarah “obey” Abraham? Does she “call him ‘lord’”? Does Abraham know Sarah is present in Genesis 18?)
- Imagine you are Sarah, and Abraham has told you to pretend you’re his sister. What do you think and feel?
- In light of how Sarah probably felt, why do you think Peter commends her for obeying Abraham?

Now: Back in your own shoes (35 minutes total)

Students discuss with their tables:

- In what ways has the social order changed since the first century? What are some examples of authority in our day? (Examples: parents, police, professors, supervisors at work, government, administration at school, etc.)
- How are these roles demarcated in our society? (Examples: executives/administrators are given parking spaces closer to the building, managers must sign off on certain activities, people must stand when a judge enters a courtroom, etc.)
- Where are you in the social order today? How is one’s level of authority determined by age, education, economic class, race, and/or situation in life?
- How does our culture view authority? (Examples: We distrust it, so we want a system of checks and balances. Even the highest authority in our land, the President, still has to answer to others. On the other hand, many people desire authority and work to achieve it for themselves; we celebrate promotions at work, etc.)
- In the interest of following biblical principles, should we go back to the social hierarchies of the first century? Why or why not?

Application questions

The leader presents each group with envelopes, in which they find the following different scenarios.

Using what you have learned and discussed tonight, together decide what you think Peter would tell you if you were in any of these situations. For example:

- You go on a mission trip to Romania, where women are not supposed to speak in church. The leader of the trip is an ordained minister who also happens to be a woman. The Romanian pastor asks her not to speak, preach, or pray in public. If she insists on her right to speak, is she hindering the spread of the gospel? If she agrees to remain silent, is she perpetuating a demeaning view of women?
- You have a professor who is hostile toward Christians. He is constantly making snide remarks in class about Christians, and he has even singled you out several times. Should you drop the class? Make a witty comment back in lecture? Confront him during office hours? Ignore him altogether? Report him to the administration?
- You’re getting married to a Christian. In your premarital counseling, the pastor asks you and your fiancé(e) what you believe about submission in marriage. What do you say? What do you do if your fiancé(e) disagrees with you?
- A woman in your church recently confided in you that her non-Christian husband has been abusing her. She believes that 1 Peter 3 says she should stay with her abusive husband as a witness to Christ’s suffering. If she leaves, he might never become a Christian. Is this passage sanctioning abuse? How do you counsel her?
- During the year, you’re in college, living on your own without any rules, but when you go home for Christmas, your parents want you to honor a curfew. Not only that, but the reason you want to stay out late is to go to a Bible study at your friend’s house. Your parents aren’t Christians, and they don’t understand your belief in God. Do you abide by the curfew and leave Bible study early? Do you tell them you’re an adult now and can make your own decisions? Do you invite your friends to hold the Bible study at your house?
- You work part-time as a grocery store clerk. Recently, a coworker was promoted to manager. She has started taking advantage of her higher position to give you jobs you hate. Sometimes she makes you mop the floor when another employee has done so already. What do you do? Do you go above her head and talk to her boss? Do you bite your tongue and view your labor as an example of Christ-like suffering? Do you invite her to church?

Closing

The leader asks how the students’ preconceptions have changed and then wraps up and reviews the general principles to be drawn from 1 Peter 3:5–6 (and its context).

Met with Dancing: The Changing Faces of African Christian Women

LYNN COHICK

Introduction

Gender does not exist alone, but is, in fact, a social construct.¹ A woman is part of a community that defines and shapes the definition of gender. It is not enough just to focus on gender, as though that will reveal all there is to know about African Christian women. In fact, even the qualifiers “African” and “Christian” are at one level too broad. For example, a woman from Rwanda will have experienced life much differently than one from Nigeria because the social and political situations of each country are quite different. Again, an Anglican raised in the church will have a different perspective on the faith than a newly converted pentecostal. Those differences need not discourage, for they provide the spice which enriches the entire meal. As Denise Ackermann explains, “Difference, once acknowledged, opens the way to participation and inclusiveness.”²

I hope to accomplish several things in this article. First, I want to allot space for the African Christian woman to speak her thoughts. In the past, African women have been silenced, or, if they did speak, no one bothered to listen. Now, after these women were told for so long to keep quiet, some in the West are a bit presumptuous in their expectations, shoving a microphone under an African woman’s mouth and turning the stage lights on. I recognize that it is not always easy to speak when one’s voice is not warmed up, so my intention in doing short, private interviews was to allow for a free exchange of ideas, and then to give those ideas a careful hearing.

In focusing on African Christian women’s identity, one is faced with establishing just what is meant by the term “identity.” I would suggest that there is no single, elusive identity waiting to be discovered, but, rather, several identities that interact in various social settings. Govinden Devarakshanam notes that the search for a “true” identity is futile. “We need to affirm many identities, to challenge colonial, imperialist paradigms of our identity which make us think of ourselves one-dimensionally, in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy.”³ Women are assigned identities such as wife, mother, daughter-in-law, job holder, and housekeeper. All these shape her own perception of individuality, and no woman can be reduced to a single identity.

Not only will the African Christian women interviewees speak, but, second, I will ponder a particular biblical story: that of Jephthah’s daughter, found in the book of Judges, as it reveals (more or less) the identity of a nameless daughter, as well as her

interaction with and relationship to God and others in the story. I will use a narrative-critical approach informed by a feminist perspective on this story because of this approach’s power both to bring biblical stories to life and to relate these stories to contemporary experiences.

Not only will the interviewees’ and Jephthah’s daughter’s voices be heard, but, third, I will also suggest possible connections between contemporary African Christian women’s experiences and those recorded in the biblical story as a way to empower and encourage all women (and men) today. For, if these stories from the African women are merely heard, then we might fall into the trap noted by James when he spoke of the person who looks in the mirror, but, when one turns away, one has forgotten what one looks like (James 1:22–24). To hear the stories is to assume responsibility. That responsibility takes the form of communion building—that is, acknowledging differences as potential strengths leading to participation and inclusiveness. Our differences make us special and unique before God, and in that truth we find common ground.

Project defined

My study into the stories of some African Christian women began as I taught at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) in Nairobi, Kenya. I enjoyed meeting many women from across sub-Saharan Africa and wanted to know more about their experiences as Christian women. I developed several questions that I felt might interest women in the West, my target audience. I brought the questions before a few graduate-level female students for their comments. In the end, we chose six questions, easily answerable in about one-half hour. Each of the twenty-seven women interviewed met with me privately in a quiet room, where I taped our conversation and then later transcribed it. To hear from women who have spent their whole lives in a rural setting, I traveled about an hour’s walk from our home to interview three Kenyan women with whom I had formed a relationship. I also interviewed a Kenyan woman, Judy Mbugua, who has traveled to many places in the West and is the international chairperson for AD2000 Women’s Track⁴ as well as the continental coordinator of PACWA (Pan African Christian Women Alliance).

To all the women, I asked the following questions in the order given:

1. Why did God create you? How might your family, your husband answer that? How would you wish they would answer that?
2. Describe yourself.
3. Have you ever wished that you had been born a boy? How different for you would it be if you were born a boy?
4. How much of your own life do you control? How does God and your husband/father/brother affect the control of your life?
5. Does Jesus (God) reveal himself to you? If so, how? Does



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he do it in the same way as he would to your father, husband, brother?

6. Finish this sentence: "Do you know what women lack most? They lack ____." What would raise, change, or improve women's ____?

I chose the title of this article, "Met with Dancing," from the story of Jephthah's daughter, a young virgin who is introduced as she runs to greet her victorious father. Her story will be dealt with in greater detail below, but what captured my imagination was the initial joy she exuded in celebrating her father's return from battle. That image of unrestrained joy is one that resonates with the African Christian woman singing and dancing with joy in worship before her God.

Unfortunately, neither Jephthah's daughter's story nor the stories of African women stop there. The daughter is overcome with grief from outside forces—in this case, her father. Grief and sorrow are also a very real part of so many African Christian women's experiences. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to begin my study of comparing the stories of African Christian women and those of the women in Judges with a tale of joy turned to tragedy, for it seems that these extremes characterize the life experiences of contemporary African women.

Jephthah's daughter

"And there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her." (Judg. 11:34)⁵

We first meet Jephthah's daughter running out of the house, filled with joy at the return of her father. Following tradition, she was dancing and playing music to celebrate Israel's victory. She had no premonition of what lay ahead. Instead, she seemed sure of herself, her duty, and her love for her father. One might wonder if she also felt secure in her father's love. Did she assume that he would embrace her, kiss her, and perhaps dance with her in celebration of his victory?

Tragically, she does not know what the reader knows. Earlier in the story, the narrator let the reader see a part of Jephthah that bodes evil for his daughter. Though he is remembered as a mighty warrior (11:1, see also Heb. 11:32), we see traits of weakness and insecurity that come together for his daughter's demise. First, we learn that his mother was a prostitute (11:1). Right away, the reader is alerted to his less-than-desirable background. Another man mentioned earlier in Judges, Abimelech, is the son of a concubine, and is quite violent (see Judg. 9). It may be that the author is suggesting that these two men share character traits.

A second piece of information we discover about him is that Jephthah's own brothers force him to leave the house and prevent him from taking any inheritance with him. The reference to being thrown out of his house foreshadows his lot in life. After leaving home, he picks up with robbers, living a wild, unsettled

life. And, more importantly for our purposes, later in his story, we see him again with an empty house, bereaved of his daughter. We sense that Jephthah himself is experiencing at a personal level what the nation as a whole is going through, namely, moral decay and spiritual depravity leading to acts of unspeakable violence

and horror. A quick perusal of the entire book introduces the reader to an enemy stabbed through the temple with a tent peg (Judg. 4), an entire town burned alive (Judg. 9), a concubine raped by angry townspeople before being cut up by her husband (Judg. 19), and young women stolen during a festival (Judg. 21).

After some time, the Gileadites plead with Jephthah to lead them in battle against the Ammonites, which, after some wrangling, he agrees to do. In calling together the troops, the narrator mentions that the Spirit of the Lord has come upon Jephthah (11:29). He prepares to attack, and then, unexpectedly and unprompted, makes a most unusual vow: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering" (11:30–31).

Questions flood the reader's mind. Why did he make the vow in the first place? What had he expected to come out of the house to meet him? What was God's response to the vow? None of these questions is answered adequately by the narrator directly; however, the silence should not necessarily be understood as condoning the vow. The editor of Judges will often refrain from interpreting or evaluating specific behavior. The whole book, however, has, as its theme, "in those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25). The narrator often allows the reader to judge whether a specific act would qualify as an example of doing what was right in one's own eyes. But the narrator also presents character traits and flaws to help the reader determine the appropriateness of an individual act.⁶

The events themselves might suggest that God honored the vow. The language of the text might also support this, as in the vow Jephthah asks that God gives "the Ammonites into my hands," and we find that "the Lord gave them into his hands" (11:32). Yet, God's silence need not indicate approval; in fact, it may signal rejection of the vow. God called out to Abraham, checking the knife as it was raised above Isaac's neck (Gen. 22:11–12), but condemned Manassah for offering his son (2 Kings 21:6, see also Lev. 18:21). Moreover, because the battle had already been structured by Jephthah as a fight between the Lord and the Ammonite god, Chemosh, its outcome had little to do with his vow. Until we have more clues, we cannot determine at this point just what God's reactions are to the vow.

The battle won and the Ammonites defeated, Jephthah now returns home. His daughter, unnamed throughout the story, has heard the news of his conquest and has prepared to meet her father with a celebration. One wonders if she organized a meal in his honor, whether she herself was busy in the kitchen when a call

rang out that her father had been spotted on his way to his house. One might imagine her dropping the spoon with which she was preparing the stew, hastily wiping her hands and smoothing the stray hairs from her face, then darting out the door to play music of celebration and dance.

As we picture her heading out the door, we wonder if she shooed aside a noisy hen scratching in the dirt at the doorway or stepped over the family's goat resting in the small patch of sunshine let in by the open door. For, in the Israelites' homes, the animals shared space with the human occupants. Animals were kept on one side of the house, much like today in a Maasai's home, where pride of place goes to the cows and goats. Their space is as one enters the home, and, after passing through their space, one enters the living and sleeping quarters of the Maasai. How different our story would be if that imagined goat jumped up from its nap and scampered out the door ahead of Jephthah's daughter.

The daughter is never named for the reader. This is unsettling to our ears. One way this discomfort has been dealt with is to give her a name. My children listen to Bible stories on audiocassette by Focus on the Family's *Adventures in Odyssey*, a radio program. These tapes offer both Bible stories and tales of everyday life that involve moral decisions. I listened recently with them to a tape telling the story of Jephthah, only to discover that in their telling of the tale, they named the daughter Adeena. Moreover, they leave open the possibility that she does not die in the end, for they claim the vow is ambiguous at this point. (Interestingly, in the twelfth century, a tradition within Judaism developed that suggested that she was not killed, but just put in solitary confinement.)⁷ This makes for a much nicer story, especially for children. In a similar vein, the ancient work by Pseudo Philo, *The Book of Biblical Antiquities*, chapters 39–40, in its retelling of the story, names the daughter Seila. In this rendition, the narrator allows God to chastise Jephthah for his reckless vow. Frankly, I wish the biblical narrator had named the daughter and been more direct in the denunciation of the vow, but we cannot claim that comfort. Instead, we must wrestle with the realities of oppression and arrogance that promulgate lost identities and missing persons.

Though she is unnamed, we do know that she is his only child. The narrator stresses this point by repeating it: "She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her." She is his only heir, and one might be tempted to posit that she was also the apple of her father's eye. Other examples come to mind, such as Abraham's love for Isaac or Jacob's love for Joseph and then Benjamin. Phyllis Tribble in a footnote remarks that, in the Greek Bible, the descriptions are translated with *monogenēs* (only) and *agapētē* (beloved).⁹ With the first term, John describes Jesus in John 3:16 (his only Son), and with the second, in Mark, God uses the term when speaking of Jesus, his beloved Son, at his baptism (Mark 1:11).

At least two ramifications can be drawn from this important information that Jephthah has one child, a daughter. First, the reader must know that Jephthah's hope for a future family line is held tenuously by this one offspring. This motif is found elsewhere in early Israelite history; one thinks immediately of Abraham and Isaac, the son of the promise. Much energy is spent describing

how God preserves Isaac, his mother Sarah (from other men who were told by Abraham that she was his sister), and Abraham, so that Sarah and Abraham's children will one day be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Thus, when the reader first learns that Jephthah has one child, one is not immediately concerned, but rather expects that God will work wondrously and providentially to secure the family line—until the reader remembers the vow.

On a more speculative note, in repeating that she was Jephthah's only child, the narrator might be commenting on either the favored quality of the daughter, or condemning Jephthah, or both. Stories of families having only one child generally focus on God working specially in that family. One can think of Ruth's Obed, Hannah's Samuel, Manoah's wife's Samson, or Sarah's Isaac. A single child might indicate that God is going to do something special with that one. Yet two points must be kept in mind. The other "only child" examples are all males. Inheritance is through the sons, though exceptions were made, as in the case of Zelophehad's daughters (Num. 27 and 36), where Moses decreed that "if a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter" (Num. 27:8). Second, large families were blessings, and infertility itself in ancient Israel was seen as disgraceful. Barren women were ashamed, and the culture looked at their condition as resulting from some displeasure by God.

I suggest that both concepts are working here in our story. The narrator is highlighting the special quality of this daughter, noting at the end of the text that she is remembered each year with a lament. Yet, I think there might also be a rebuke here against Jephthah. That is, Jephthah's foolish pledge wiped out his family, though only one child had to pay with her life. He had no sons or other daughters who could support or cover up the loss of his one and only child. God did not bless his pledge with more time or opportunity to act rashly again. Unfortunately, that lesson is not considered in much of the history of reflection on this text. But, within the story itself, I suggest we see divine condemnation that Jephthah's reckless promise to God should not be rewarded with many children and grandchildren.

Children are a blessing

Children were essential to the Israelite economy. In subsistence farming, the Israelites were dependent upon children who provided necessary labor. Within the African culture as well, children are highly valued. They are understood as a gift from God for the extended family, not just for the father and mother. While most families desire both boys and girls, they are valued for different reasons. Boys will stay close to the parents, remain part of the family, and offer assistance to their parents and siblings. They can prepare the soil for planting and build the houses (though in some tribes, such as the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania, the women build and maintain the houses). Young boys might watch over the livestock as it grazes a few kilometers from the house.

Girls are appreciated for their household skills. Young girls watch over younger siblings, fetch water and firewood, and work in the gardens. Because so much labor is involved in just accomplishing daily tasks, lots of hands are needed. It is estimated

that as much as seventy-five percent of a woman's day in rural Africa is spent getting the necessities for her family—collecting water that might be as much as several miles' walk away from the house, gathering firewood, picking the vegetables in the garden, cooking them on the fire, and cleaning the clothes and dishes. And the cycle begins again the next day.

As the women interviewed reflected on their own childhoods and whether or not their identities as women were affirmed, several expressed the conviction that they were desired by their parents, even that their parents were happy to have girls. Pauline Mukeshimana, age thirty-two, from Rwanda, declared, "I was happy to be a girl, because, in my father's family, they have boys, boys, boys, and when I came, I was the firstborn, a girl. So they were very happy. That is the significance of my name. It means 'by God's grace, I have a girl.' So I grew up with thinking, like I am more preferred." Charlotte Niyonsavye, fifty-four, from Burundi, explained that she was the first girl after four boys. Her name, given to her by her father, means "I asked for her." Both her parents were very happy to have her, because, as she explained, the country was at peace at that time, and children of both genders were desired so that the population could grow. In exploring this further, I asked a Kenyan father of three daughters if he was sad not to have a son. He told me that, in his tribe (Kamba), they say that he is rich with cows and goats—that is, he will gain wealth from the bride price. And, as girls do most of the work around the house, their labor is valued.

But, some women desire to be valued for things other than bride price and kitchen work. The frustration of many was aptly put by Mariette Ouahanata, twenty-four, from Burkina Faso, when she noted that "they don't know also the girls can do better and work even more than cooking in the kitchen."

So, girls can be seen as a blessing for the family, but not in all families. One woman noted that her failure to produce a son after three girls incited the husband's family to urge him to get a second wife. Feli Negura, thirty-four, from Congo, explained, "In my family it has not been easy for me . . . to live with my husband." She and her husband were from different tribes; moreover, because she gave birth only to girls, her husband's family was pressuring him to marry another wife in an attempt to have sons. His father had married a second wife because the first wife had only girls. But Feli stood firm: "I will not go away." She is now happy with her husband and three girls.

From Feli's story, we can highlight several important points. First, we note the dishonor that enveloped her in her family's eyes.⁸ Second, Feli's story highlights the family's or community's leverage over individual marriages and children. Tribal concerns and parental interests strongly influence the course of a son's or daughter's marriage. For example, I have heard it said on a number of different occasions that a primary duty or expectation of a wife is to agree with and support her mother-in-law. The story of Ruth in the Bible is set up as an example of a wonderful daugh-

ter-in-law who helps her mother-in-law with humility and love. Failure to do whatever the mother-in-law requests leads to much disharmony within the marriage. Often, the husband will follow his mother, leaving the wife feeling outnumbered and alone. As we shall see below, Jephthah had complete control over his daughter's future (or lack of it).

The fact that Jephthah had but one child, a daughter, has been commented upon. I suggested that the narrator might be judging Jephthah in emphasizing his small family. It is a truism that Africans consider a family with many children to be a blessed one. Reinforcing this idea, Jane, from rural Kenya, noted that women need children.

She encouraged barren women to pray to God, who was able to give children to the barren women of the Bible. She does not think barren women were somehow cursed or punished by God in their barrenness, but she did feel quite sorry for them, as she herself has four children.

Marriage is an almost universal goal among African Christian women; it seems the expected norm. That was certainly the case at the time of Judges, and, as we return to the story, we see the daughter speaking for the first time, speaking about the immanent loss of that hope of marriage and family. Her father has spoken unjustly to her, blaming her for his despair: "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow" (Judg. 11:35). His rash vow has caught up with him.

"My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has given you vengeance against your enemies." (Judg. 11:36)

The daughter now speaks, addressing her father. Her response to him reveals much about her character, including her bravery, realism, and self-confidence. She echoes some of his words, but nuances them such that she deflects the blame he has laid upon her. Her tone is deferential, but, at the same time, retains a measure of self-respect that, had she been a weaker person, might have been stripped away by the father's words.

She begins her response by echoing her father's words. The Septuagint presents her first sentence as a question. This raises queries in the reader's mind. It may be that her response indicates that she can hardly believe her father would be so foolish as to pledge his daughter's life in a vow. Perhaps she is offering him a chance to restate or reformulate his vow. Again, her desire may be to give her father pause, to cause him to reconsider what he has done, and to seek a way out before the Lord. As I noted above, child sacrifice was not honored by Israel's God (see Ezekiel's indictment, Ezek. 23:37–40). Isaac was spared by God when Abraham demonstrated his faithfulness and obedience (Gen. 22). Saul was persuaded by the people to spare Jonathan's life after Saul's foolish oath that no man in the army was to eat anything until the

enemy was completely defeated. Though Jonathan had not heard the oath, nevertheless, he was still judged guilty. Yet, the people ransomed him, because he brought great victory to the Israelites (1 Sam. 14:24–45). In the face of Jephthah's apparent resignation, perhaps his daughter was trying to warn her father against following through on his "unholy" vow.

The daughter repeats her father's words, "opened my mouth to the Lord," but then in the next clause modifies them significantly. Instead of accepting his excuse that he "cannot take back [his] vow," she emphasizes that he, her father, is responsible for "what has gone out of [his] mouth." Lest he think he can blame the Lord for this horrible dilemma, she reminds him that it was his own words, and not the Lord's direction, that has landed them in this imbroglio. Moreover, just as he cannot blame God for the trouble, so too she does not accept that she is the cause of his sorrow. Her response focuses the responsibility back where it should be: on his own words that came from his mouth.

Finally, she notes that her father was given vengeance over his "enemies, the Ammonites." I find it curious that she identifies the enemies by name. It may be that she names them to reinforce to her father that she is not his enemy, if he has spoken to her angrily. He cannot make her into the enemy, for God has delivered him from his enemies, the Ammonites. These final words of her first sentence reveal her self-confidence, her unwillingness to be defined as her father's downfall. She knows that she is not the enemy. Whatever might characterize her father's relationship to the Lord, she displays the conviction that neither she nor the Lord is at fault.

All of the above cited evidence points to a woman who understands that vows must be kept and who believes that God would not ask for human sacrifice to appease or compel him. She rejoices in God who grants Israel victory, evidenced in her celebrating with dancing. Her faith appears uncomplicated and sincere, unlike the manipulative approach of her father.

Jephthah's vow contrasts sharply with another vow made just a bit later in Israel's history, the vow of Hannah, mother of Samuel: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head" (1 Sam. 1:11). Hannah reflects a humility not present in Jephthah's vow. She juxtaposes her own helpless state with a recognition of God's power and mercy. She is not bargaining with God for personal gain; her desire is for the child to be in the service of God. True, having a child will also take away her shame, but she is willing to give God all the honor through her child.

Jephthah's daughter has acknowledged that the Lord has indeed given him the victory. But she does not use that term, instead referring to his conquest as "vengeance." Her choice of terms might reflect what she knows about her father's character. He only asked God for the victory, and he himself admitted that he had no grudge against the king of Ammon (11:12). He called on God to judge between them concerning rights to the disputed

land (11:27). There was no cause here to avenge himself; it was enough that God decided in Israel's favor and that they retained possession of the land. Yet the daughter attributes to her father a much harsher judgment on the Ammonites than perhaps they deserved.

And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I." (Judg. 11:37)

Lacking any response from her father, she plunges on. She asks that she might have some time to grieve her death sentence. Her pill is all the more bitter because she will die without having truly lived as a woman. She apparently was coming to the age of marriage and was hoping for children. The narrator supports the daughter's interpretation of her plight by stating twice in the following two verses that she was a virgin.

There are numerous examples of barren women in the Bible. And, in many cases, God opens their wombs and the children born become central figures in God's plan for Israel. One can think of Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Manoah's wife, and Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother. These women testify to their plight: their lack of respect within the community because of their barrenness. And they extol God for his faithfulness in allowing them the honor of motherhood.

Jephthah's daughter does not grovel before her father, but places before him what appears to be a reasonable request. As her punishment is so great, she should go out and mourn her fate. She asks that she might travel to the mountains and lament her virginity. It is often in the mountains that God can be found. One thinks of Moses meeting God on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19–20), of Elijah meeting God in the fire on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18), and in the whisper on Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19). She has chosen to lament in a sacred space.

She does not mourn alone. Several companions join her in her mourning. And for two months they live outside their homes, in the wilderness¹⁰ in the mountains. It was common for women to be found in groups at this time. We find them dancing when God brought victory in battles (Exod. 15:20), rejoicing over a baby's birth (Ruth 4:17), or mourning a death (John 11). Mentioning the companions also allows the narrator to explain that the memorial lament offered each year by the women of Israel has its roots in their sharing Jephthah's daughter's pain for two months as they mourned her plight of dying a virgin. They will remember her with special honor because she will have missed the honor of motherhood. Tribble suggests that the final statement should be rendered, "She became a tradition in Israel," because "the unnamed virgin child became a tradition in Israel because the women with whom she chose to spend her last days have not let her pass into oblivion."¹¹

The remaining verses of this act in Jephthah's play are devoted to the daughter. The reader mourns with the narrator and the companions that this virgin has been sacrificed. To end on such a vile note would be tragic, and, thankfully, the narrator exonerates

the daughter by explaining the Israelite custom that remembers her yearly. A four-day festival commemorates her sacrifice, and stands in judgment of Jephthah's reckless vow.

Against this background, I asked African women what they thought about their own power to make choices, especially as they made self-determining decisions about marriage, family, and schooling. Some expressed the overflowing joy witnessed in Jephthah's daughter at the beginning of her story. They exuded self-confidence and were comfortable with themselves. Others expressed discouragement and frustration at limitations placed on them by their communities and cultures.

How much of your own life do you control?

An overwhelming majority of the women interviewed believed that they controlled their own lives. They did place restrictions on themselves, such as not deserting their children or husbands to pursue schooling. I wonder if at least some of the women felt that they could do anything they chose to do because they only wanted to do that which their culture and society approved. They were independent within the strictures of their culture.

Many women said they were free to marry whomever they chose; however, some had to stand up for themselves and their choices in the face of family opposition. Mary Aluel from southern Sudan told me, "In our area, a girl, she cannot have her own choice to [marry]. They [the extended family] can tell you, you can go. But for me, I can have choice. I said no. I cannot go the way you send me to go if I don't like. Do not oppose me; I cannot be forced. [The family imprisoned her in a house for three days, but she was] happy to be there until they changed their minds but not me. I didn't change my mind. So they stop it. Until now they forget; they cannot talk again to force me."

Grace Kiuta, twenty-nine, from Kenya, noted that, when she decided on her husband, there was "a lot of opposition, . . . but I just said I met my man and say I will just get married to this, because I am feeling that it's the will of God." Her parents did support her, but other family members did not approve because she was marrying a pastor, someone who would likely always be poor. I asked her if she would have gone ahead with the marriage if her parents had protested. She believed she still would have married.

Mariette Ouahanata, twenty-four, from Burkina Faso, explained how she was allowed to choose her own mate. "When I was three years old, my father died and leave me with my uncle, and—that uncle—I appreciate him very well, the way he educate me, although he is not a Christian." She noted that he kept her at home, away from social dancing, so that her eventual husband would respect her and not say, "You come to me, others have already spoiled you." Then, in her late teens, she became very ill. No help in the village was found, so they took her to the city to be with her grandmother. While there, a missionary friend of the grandmother's prayed for her healing. She was healed and decided to go to church, where she "gave her life to Jesus." About three years later, she decided to attend Bible college, and her uncle felt that, as she was twenty years old, she could decide for herself. She also selected her husband. "I decide, we decide first that I will

marry him, and he decide he will marry me. After that, we went to our parents to let them know we have decided to marry each other. They can't force me to give me another man. Now the way I was [very ill several years previous], they were thinking I would die, and I didn't die, so now I'm OK and I have chosen a man to marry. So they say they are OK with my decision." In Mariette's case, her recovery from the serious illness seemed to give her special status with her family, as she describes it. They would not stand in her way.

In describing her freedom to choose directions in her life, Charlotte Niyonsavye, fifty-four, from Burundi, explained that she first thinks about what she wants to do, and then she does it. She noted that her behavior is not typical of women in her village. She attributed her differences to the fact that her husband is a Christian, he studied theology himself, and he is very considerate. She does not use her freedom irresponsibly, but does feel that she can make choices. Zipporah, seventy-four, from rural Kenya, expressed her confidence in partnering with her husband. She explained that, when they might disagree, they will "talk, talk, talk, and talk" about the issue. I sensed she felt herself to be in a secure position within her marriage.

Some interviewees stated that their husbands are the final authority in the home, but that belief does not seem to impact their sense of autonomy. The two concepts exist side by side with no apparent sense of contradiction. For example, Rev. Judy Mbugua, fifty-two, from Kenya, states that "I would say I do control my life in the sense that there's nothing that I want to do that my husband puts his foot down and says, 'No, you can't do it.' And, again, this is because my husband and I are very good friends. So, if he knows that I want anything, he wouldn't get in my way to stop it." Judy does believe that her husband is the final decision-maker of the family, but she adds that she wishes all women could share their thoughts with their husbands, rather than the typical relationship where the husband always just says "no" to his wife's ideas and requests.

In a similar way, Angelique Cyamanzi Chelo, thirty-three, from Congo, told me that she was free to marry whomever she chose: "I always ask God to give me a Christian husband, a husband who will not be beating me, because I was always afraid to be beaten every time. A husband who I will obey him in every situation through what he will do for me." I asked her to give me an example of how she obeys her husband. She answered that the couple should "always talk together and do what your husband needs and him also to do what you need. . . . Even Bible says the husband is the head; I have to do it." She noted as an example that she might prepare a meal for his friends. "I feel also, because husband is like a near friend, you have to tell him what is not going wrong . . . or what is going bad for you. I have to be open, and I'm always open before him." She added that he is open before her as well.

This sense of autonomy, coupled with a hierarchical arrangement in the home, finds a parallel in evangelical Christian women in the United States. R. Marie Griffith discusses the language and reality behind it of women who promote male "head-

ship” within the home, and yet feel their “submission” is self-empowering: “For these evangelical women the meanings of submission and surrender represent far more than simple passivity. . . . Submission works as a valuable tool for containing husbands and thereby regulating the home, and may be subtly modified or subverted, so that the women retain a kind of mediated agency through their reliance on the omnipotent God.”¹¹ Both groups share a position that God created certain gender-based roles for women (and for men) to fulfill. As a woman engages fully in her God-given roles of submissive (or obedient) wife and loving mother, she will be happy and contented.

Griffith notes that submission also at times has been discussed as a way to manipulate one’s husband: “Surrender to God may be seen . . . as what I have termed ‘containment,’ that is, a submission more of word than of deed that celebrates the power to influence—or, in less flattering terms, manipulate—one’s husband to one’s own ends.” This attitude toward submission was most evident in one interviewee’s discussion with me about decision making in her home: “I find that I don’t just do what I want. In a way, it is safer for me in the sense that I don’t have [to] make a decision which I later could regret.” She further explained her “psychology” of the home, wherein, if she wanted something, she would pray about it and then create the situation such that her husband believed that it was his idea all along to do that thing when, in fact, it was her idea.

Before leaving these women’s stories about marriage, I should highlight one further point from Angelique’s account: her reference to wife beating. It would go beyond the scope of this article to discuss this subject fully, but, unfortunately, this practice plagues much of Africa. Alcohol abuse is often behind the violence. Newspapers report weekly on women who are hacked to death with *pangas* (eighteen-inch knives used in cutting grass for the cows and sticks for the fire) or doused with kerosene and then burned. These more shocking crimes arouse the outrage of the population, but the daily beatings go on. In many ways, the newspapers record stories of situations wherein “every man did what seemed right in his own eyes,” harkening back to the days of Judges. As in Jephthah’s case, so too today in much of African culture, the man—the father or husband—has unlimited control over decisions and directions within the family. Wives and daughters struggle to be heard and to find their own way.

Though the issue of marriage is the place where women struggle most in maintaining or creating autonomy and space for self-determining decision making, a second subject concerning control of one’s life is schooling. Esther Yogo Suwa, thirty-six, from southern Sudan, claims, “I do control my life. Like now, I decide for myself going to school, and I’m still struggling with it. My husband might say, you know, we don’t have [financial] support, and why do you still go? But I just go because . . . No, he didn’t support me [financially]. I understand; I know he can’t. It is not that he doesn’t want to do it.” When I asked if he encouraged her, she said, “Yes, but sometimes when things become worse, he’ll

say, I wish you’d stay home.” She laughs and adds, “You know I can work and support the family, but he does encourage me.”

Adel Matabisi noted that “I grow up feeling that, like, you are responsible for your whole life. Everything. You are the one who can make them [decisions], until I received Jesus, then I said, ‘Oh, I understand it is not my responsibility. I have just to do the right thing and have faith to Jesus that he will do the rest.’ I just

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say, ‘Oh God, do anything you want for me. But I still have what I want. Like as I am here [at school]. I said, I want to study. And I start this studying in Congo before the war. Then the war start, I say I will not stay home, I have to continue, then I came here [to NEGST]. But . . . my husband helped on it, because

he understood and he is the one who said, ‘Oh yes, this is a good idea. Go ahead.’”

Adel’s response suggests another tension that Christian women face: that of feeling in control of their lives and yet ceding control to God. Adel expressed a resolution: “I know it is God’s decision [whether she goes to school or not], but I have to perform it, I think.” There is a “partnership” of sorts. The sense of control seems to come from the recognition that one is enacting the very will of God. This same sort of relationship was noticed by Griffith in her study of American evangelical and pentecostal women. She notes that “surrender to God may be seen, first, as a way of releasing divine power.”¹³

Moreover, Adel noted that her Christianity did not take away her “wants” such as studying: “So I said, ‘Yeah, if you can allow me to study,’ and now I am studying.” She petitioned God concerning her wants, and she is doing what she wanted—perhaps, one would say, with God’s permission.

It may be that petitioning is a key to understanding the apparent paradox between a feeling of power and of surrender that many interviewees expressed. Prayer, for most of the women with whom I spoke, is a dynamic process wherein God speaks directly to them as they seek God. Such communication circumvents any male authority, including their husbands. Griffith notes that many evangelical women in the United States understand themselves as submissive to their husbands, but as warriors of prayer, battling evil and sin. That latter role is active, aggressive, and empowering.¹⁴ This parallels the lamenting done by Jephthah’s daughter and her companions, wherein they separated themselves and sought solace in a holy place. We are not told about their prayers, but we know that every year four days are set aside to remember her before God; thus, her life becomes a connecting point between the Israelite women and their God.

Conclusion: glancing back and moving forward

I will close this article in the same way I finished the interviews: by asking the women what they might like to tell me. Many encouraged their churches and Christian communities to allow a more active role for women in leadership positions, and it is this aspect of their comments that will serve as possible steps forward.

Many women desired a more active leadership role in their churches. Mary Wambui, twenty-one, from Kenya, told me, "You know, many Christians, like . . . [in] some denominations they [women] are hindered . . . they can't talk in public, they cannot express themselves . . . they cannot raise the point." Mary Aluel, from southern Sudan, concurred: "In Africa, many ladies are Christian, and there is no problem they can do what in church. . . . They believe you are a person who can serve, they can allow you to tell the word of God, but it's hard to become a pastor. It's very hard in Africa. They can let you work in church like a helper, but not to be like a pastor or say the word with authority. It's difficult. You cannot lead. I cannot agree, because, if you educated, you can teach or lead." She lamented that women can hold ideas in their hearts, but no one will listen. And they feel ashamed. As she left the interview, she said that she'd like to be a man.

Mary mentioned the value of education in determining a leader. Janet Mutinda, thirty, from Kenya, who acted as an intern at her church, would agree. She noted that "in the African church, theological training is a privilege for few. I wish the church would move beyond that and not just make it for few, usually just men. And some of them [women at NEGST] feel I'm competing with men when we have a student body meeting and a guy says something and I respond. I'm not responding because he's a guy, I don't disagree with him because he's a guy. It's the issue. I'm not dealing with the person. So for them, they feel it's disrespect." She adds that, now at graduation time, many ask her what she will do. "Ah, you are a pastor, and they say it in a very sarcastic [way], even Christians, and for many years I never wanted, even when I was working as a youth pastor at Nairobi Chapel, I never wanted anybody to [identify me as a pastor]." But now Janet is thinking about what it means to be a pastor, though she did not share with me any conclusions she might have discovered.

Dinah Elegwa, twenty-three, from Kenya, noted that "in most churches, women are not allowed to lead, and I don't think it's they cannot lead, it's only that they're not given a chance to do it, but when they are given a chance and the freedom to do it, they will do it even better." When I asked her why she thought this situation existed, she said, "I think it is because of the African culture where women are just looked down on." Grace Kiuta, from Kenya, agreed. "Even in the church, they don't have any freedom, the women. And, yet, if you see them, many of them are very good gifts, but now they cannot even talk in the congregation. Some churches, they don't allow them to preach. They're told to talk with the women. And sometimes I feel that, if the church is doing this, and the world also is looking down on [women], who is going to help these women to come out of this? I think the church should be the help. They could just accept women, that they are people that they can give ideas and they are people of God also, and God respects them, and God loves them also."

Judy Mbugua, from Kenya, explains, "African Christian women are very dynamic in the sense that, in spite of so much suffering, by tradition and culture, by lack of knowledge, because even most of them up to now don't know how to read the word of God for themselves or to write. When they come up in faith . . . they

are so dynamic. And so the women of the world can support the women of Africa because they are so dynamic . . . in spite of so many problems. And we can be partners."

Unlike Jephthah's daughter, whose fate was sealed with an unholy vow, African women are taking charge of their own lives, defining their own way, carving out for themselves a future and a hope, and working out their own relationships with God and God's calling on their lives. Some women will seek change within the church leadership structure, others within the village's traditional community structure. Others will play a role in educating village women to read and write, while still others will themselves earn doctorates. And they will encourage their own daughters to reach for their dreams.

Their own dreams, however, might be at odds with the reality they see around them now. Ambiguities and contradictions stir underneath the seemingly placid waters of their cultures. Christine Mutua, twenty-eight, from Kenya, stated, "An African Christian woman is tied to her culture. And that culture has a significant impact on your life. So when the decisions you make, you can only make them in the (OK, you are a Christian but . . .) in that culture which you must operate in. It is positive and negative. One [negative], like I was telling you, like some of the decisions that you make, although I really want to do this, because of the culture you are in, you have to wait, you have to think of what do the other people think. So, you might not achieve your dream. Like I may be thinking of finishing my masters and going for a Ph.D., but, then, my mother-in-law may be telling my husband, 'No, a wife is supposed to stay at home.' So many pressures are playing, and you may bow to pressure." She added that one "positive [aspect of African culture] is that you feel accountable."

The realities of African culture include traditional roles for men and women within both the home and the church. Many women are seeking to broaden the opportunities for women within the church and economic life of the village. Yet, to a woman, each who was a mother extolled the joys of motherhood. Their children, boys and girls, were blessings from God beyond description. Being a mother was a privilege they would not trade for anything, even for the possibility of being a man with all his power, prestige, and authority.

And so, in the end, the women I interviewed were satisfied with themselves; even more, many had deep joy. God's gift of creating them in God's image, and then letting them be part of the process of creation in their own motherhood, grounded their self-esteem. The strictures of society, the limitations of the church, and the failings of their husbands were all tolerable and hopefully to be improved upon. Unlike our biblical text, theirs is a story of hope, a story yet unfinished. And their hope in all their struggles is God. As Rosemary Wahu Mbogo, twenty-eight, from Kenya concluded, "So, if we can encourage African women to rise up to their potential, they can do great things for Christ. I think so."

Notes

1. Denise M. Ackermann, "Participation and Inclusiveness Among Women" in *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*,

ed. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996), 140.

2. Ackermann, "Participation and Inclusiveness," 145.

3. Betty Govinden Devarakshanam, "In Search of Our Own Wells," in Kanyoro and Njoroge, *Groaning in Faith*, 118.

4. The AD2000 Women's Track seeks to promote the vision of world evangelism by mobilizing, encouraging and training women primarily through already established churches and women's groups. Online: <http://www.ad2000.org/tracks/women/index.htm>.

5. All Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

6. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1981), 183–84.

7. See George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 304.

8. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1984), 113, n. 32.

9. In Israelite culture, the mother of girls may have been treated similarly. One is left to speculate about the mother of Jephthah's daughter, about whom the Bible is silent. Was she consigned to invisibility because she only produced a girl?

10. The wilderness also holds a special place in Israel's history as the place where God took care of Israel, feeding and protecting it. Though our story does not use the term "wilderness," the sense of the passage indicates that the daughter and her companions went far from towns and villages. They were on their own, in God's care.

11. Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 106–07.

12. R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 182–83.

13. Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 185.

14. Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 191–98.

Seeking Justice and Loving Mercy

CBE 2007 International Conference
Denver, Colorado • August 10–12, 2007

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

General Sessions



The World of the Early Church:
Insights and Misconceptions
Christopher Hall



There Is No Longer Male and Female:
Gender Equality as a Question of Justice
Lidija Novakovic



Beyond Equality to Interdependence:
Women and Men in Community
Roger Olson

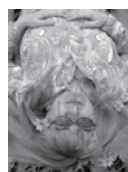


New Wineskins for New Wine:
The Work for Gender Justice in the 21st Century
Jeanne Porter

Gender and Justice Panel Discussion Join us for a discussion of gender and justice with a panel of evangelical leaders including Ron Sider (founder and president of Evangelicals for Social Action), Jo Anne Lyon (founder and president of World Hope International), Sally and Scott Harrison (founders of CURE International), and Janis Balda (research fellow and principal at the De Press Leadership Center). CBE president Mimi Haddad will moderate the panel discussion.

Workshop Sessions Choose from 24 workshop sessions on topics including Bible, history, relationships, culture, and justice led by evangelical scholars and ministry leaders like Elaine Heath, Alan Johnson, Carrie Miles, David Scholer, Sally Morgenthaler, Kevin Giles, and more.

CONFERENCE FEATURES



Vibrant Worship

Worship will be led by singer, songwriter Wendy Francisco (left), artist Gwen Meharg (right), and other gifted musicians. Devotions will be led by Rev. Dr. Deborah Gill.

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Bookstore and Authors' Autograph Party

CBE's bookstore, Equality Depot, will offer special conference discounts on many exclusive and best-selling titles. Authors who are speaking and attending the conference will sign copies of their books at the Authors' Autograph Party on Saturday evening. Bring your own books to have the authors sign, or purchase them from the conference bookstore.

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How Subjection Harms Congolese Women: A Call to Consciousness

MÉDINE MOUSSOUNGA KEENER

In many ways, women in the Republic of Congo are like others everywhere: they have emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual desires and ambitions, filled with hopes for a better life. Too often, however, their hopes go unfulfilled when their needs and desires are subjected to the selfish and sinful intent of others. This article is about the suffering of women in the Republic of Congo, my native country. I will begin by describing the many problems faced by Congolese women, relate these problems to issues faced by women everywhere, and conclude with recommendations for the future.

U.S. residents are more acquainted with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, former Zaire). But there are two Congos: the DRC and the Republic of Congo (ROC) or Congo-Brazzaville. Despite its 342,000 square kilometers, Congo-Brazzaville has only about three million inhabitants. Congo-Brazzaville has endured two recent civil wars; the latest, from 1997 to 2000, left most of the southern regions and Brazzaville, the capital, severely damaged.

Women and poverty

Congo-Brazzaville is now among the heavily indebted poor countries in the world. In the 1980s, it was considered a middle-income country, as it is one of sub-Saharan Africa's leading oil producers. But, because of war, high public debt, and corruption among leaders, the country has become very poor. About 70 percent of the Congolese population lives in poverty, surviving on about \$1.50 worth of food for a whole family per day.

The public infrastructure is very precarious. Power outages are frequent in major cities, and villages have almost no electricity. In many parts of the country, the water supply is not purified enough to protect people from diseases, and typhoid fever has become very common. Power outages likewise lead to a shortage of drinkable water. During the rainy season, roads deteriorate; ruts are made by trucks and cars passing through. Mosquitoes and bacteria breed in the big puddles.

Other problems connected to poverty are infant mortality, malnutrition, poor housing, unhygienic conditions, irregular salaries and pension arrears, and high unemployment. Poor schooling conditions make it hard for children to concentrate. Fifty to seventy-five children share one classroom in public schools, especially in villages. In some parts of the country, children must bring their own chairs, and school supplies are very rare commodities.



MÉDINE MOUSSOUNGA KEENER received her Ph.D. from the University of Paris and is currently teaching a women's history course at Eastern University in Pennsylvania. Having spent twenty months as a refugee in Congo-Brazzaville, she has firsthand experience concerning the plight of African women. She lives with her husband, Craig, and their son, David, in Philadelphia.

Women are heavily affected by poverty. In order to survive, some of them, willingly or not, become involved in different kinds of endangering behaviors and conditions.

Prostitution and the sexual abuse of women

Sexual licentiousness is one of the consequences of poverty. I am not talking about the institutionalized system of prostitution, but a different kind of rampant prostitution, which has become very prevalent in the Congo.

For many women, it starts as a means of survival, exchanging sexual favors for food, rent, clothing, or schooling. I remember young women in Brazzaville who were forced into prostitution because the parents could no longer provide for them. Parents would ask a high school-age daughter to find a rich boyfriend (usually a married man) who could supply her needs.

Another phenomenon of prostitution is that of "second bureau," in which a young (usually educated) woman will agree to become a concubine to a wealthy married man who will pay for her studies, rent an apartment for her, and provide a home for her and her children (if they have any). Of course, these young women do not see themselves as prostitutes, because they belong to one person. When I used to call frantically on the Lord to give me a husband, a friend who was the concubine of a wealthy man chided me, "Are you waiting for a husband to fall from heaven for you? Follow my example." But offering sexual favors to meet one's needs is also a form of prostitution.

Martha¹ was a very beautiful and intelligent young woman. While we attended the university in Brazzaville, life was so difficult that we needed God's grace to keep studying and stay pure. We depended on a very meager scholarship (about 60 U.S. dollars per month). So, Martha agreed to become a "second bureau" for a relatively rich man. He rented a nice apartment for them and provided for most of her needs. Over the years, they had two children, but never formalized their relationship. Then, when this man wanted to get married, he chose another woman over Martha and took both of their children with him. Martha found herself alone, poor, and used.

Compromised health

Another consequence of poverty is poor health. Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, are on the rise, and women suffer the most when AIDS is spread through marital unfaithfulness and rape. The use of condoms is now widespread, but it is an added expense to the strained family budget. It seems more urgent to spend money on a meal than on a condom. AIDS has a stigma to it, and people who get it are ashamed even to talk about it.

Honie was one of the youth I taught in Sunday school back in Congo. She was a beautiful and intelligent young Christian woman struggling with the issue of celibacy. She had a good job as a teacher and wanted to get married, but had not found the

right person yet. At the end of war, I visited Honie, who was reported to be sick a lot. I learned later that she had contracted AIDS from a boyfriend. Honie suffered a lot and died about two years later.

When some people discover that they have AIDS, they will do everything possible to help others. Philly Bongoley Lutaaya (1951–1989), an icon of Ugandan music, was the first prominent person in Uganda to proclaim publicly that he was HIV-positive. He used his talent to raise an awareness of the disease and to try to save lives. But, by contrast, Mubamba, a very wealthy man in Dolisie (my hometown), used his money to spread HIV. Mubamba had enough money to afford treatment and live a little better and longer. Meanwhile, he started to engage in unprotected sexual activities with as many women as possible in exchange for money or other favors. Eventually, women heard about him, but most did not know him by sight. We also learned that Mubamba was using condoms with holes in them to deceive women. And, after the sexual act, he would tell his victims, “This money is for your burial; my real name is Mubamba.” When he died, and people learned about it through his obituary on the radio, there was a big shout of joy in all of Dolisie, like Proverbs 11:10b states: “When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy.”

Another result of poverty is a lack of priority on breast cancer, which is on the rise. There is no screening, and the treatment is very expensive. When my friend Toto was diagnosed with breast cancer, she did not have enough money to afford the airplane ticket for Yaounde (Cameroon) and the whole treatment. So, the doctors in Congo tried to help her as best as they knew. Toto died a slow and painful death. She did not have any pain killer drugs. The only thing a lot of us could do was cry with her and pray to God to either heal her or take her home.

Abuse of women

Five major areas where women are particularly abused are in the home, at school, at work, at church, and in war.

Domestic abuse is carried out in many ways. Verbal abuse—threats and insults—is part of some women’s daily lives. Verbal insults are hurled at them and their families for small mistakes. Before the war (and before my much later marriage to Craig), I was married to a Congolese man with a Ph.D. This man used to insult me, calling me “whore,” “stupid,” and the like. I used to be so upset that I would start crying. Then, one day, I realized that I was not what he was saying. So I responded with calmness that I was not a whore since I was a virgin when he married me, and that I was not stupid, because I too have a Ph.D. My answer angered him so much that he strangled me, although I was already five months pregnant. I was saved because someone called my name from the street. As he was leaving the house, I heard him call out, “I will know that I have hurt you when you will find yourself in the hospital with one arm or leg missing.”

Many husbands inflict emotional abuse by withholding sex, love, sympathy, and understanding from their spouses. Some of them do not even remember hearing their husbands say, “I love you.” Many stay in the marriage because a divorced woman is

seen as bad and mainly because of their children. Many women live in fear of contracting AIDS or any other sexually transmitted disease from a husband’s unfaithfulness.

Baywen has been married for more than fifteen years now to her husband. They have four children. Baywen’s husband is what we call “l’homme des femmes,” that is, a man who has countless concubines. Baywen stays in the marriage because of her children (whom the husband would keep) and because somehow she still loves her husband. Her husband does not take care of her; instead, he gives money and gifts to all of his concubines. Baywen’s husband does not beat her, but he withdraws love and sex as a “punishment.” Baywen also lives in fear of getting AIDS, but she cannot leave her children to these other women, because she does not trust them to take care of her children. Her only hope is Christ.

Sexual violence affects women emotionally, physically, and mentally. When a girl or young woman is raped, the family usually forces her to marry her rapist and avoid the shame in the family. For such a woman, sexual relations with her husband will always be a source of torment and humiliation. The notion of rape in a married couple does not really exist in Congo. If a man rapes his wife and she complains (which she usually would not do), people will smile and say, “He paid the bride price, so she belongs to him.”

Physical mistreatment is part of everyday life for some women. Julia, one of my closest friends, is a strong Christian woman married to a military man. They have three children. Julia was beaten very often, and many times she would run out of the house half naked to save her life. Since she earns more money than her husband, he did not help take care of the house, food, clothing, or children’s school.

One day, Julia’s husband threw her and her children out of the house to lead his life with his many concubines. Julia had stayed in the marriage because of the children, but finally started a divorce proceeding. But, the court refused to grant her the divorce because the husband wouldn’t grant it. Finally, he came with a group of army men and took the children by force. Because the children were being badly mistreated by their father, Julia came back to live with the husband and take care of her children. Her only hope and strength were in the Lord. The weekly beatings continued until one day Julia escaped from the house all bruised and ran to her husband’s uncle. This time, the uncle, Julia’s uncles, friends, and neighbors scolded Julia’s husband for his mistreatment of his wife and children. He felt ashamed of his behavior and has made some significant changes. I praise God for helping my friend Julia, but I know that her situation needs more improvement and prayers.

Abuse in school

Most girls and young women suffer some sort of sexual harassment in school that can lead to sexual abuse. It seems that some Congolese teachers believe that a woman is not intelligent enough to succeed by herself; she needs help. The way they help her is to grant her a higher grade in exchange for sexual favors.

Missie and I were in the same junior high school when she was raped. She was a beautiful and hardworking teenager. One day, a group of boys attacked her and raped her. She found herself in the hospital for a number of days. To my knowledge, those boys were not punished, and people used to make fun of Missie, even though she was the victim. Many boys used to glory in the fact that they had raped girls, especially intelligent and beautiful ones.

Many students called the University of Brazzaville (l'université Marien Ngouabi) "the empire of evil." Justine, a first-year student, did well in her courses. But one professor did not hand back her papers. During the final exams, that professor whispered in her ears that, if she did not go to his house to retrieve her grades, she would not pass the course. Now, she knew what that meant: he wanted to have sex with her. She went and prayed with her brothers in Christ and asked the Lord for his help. She went to the professor's house and told him that, if he loved her, she would be willing to marry him, but he had to go and see her parents first. The professor was taken aback and gave her the grades.

One of my professors in the University of Brazzaville wanted to "talk" with me for a long time, but I never gave him the opportunity. So, he warned me that he would be expecting me for the oral exam—i.e., to fail me. Happily, every time I was scheduled for the oral exam, my name was on the list for the other professor. Another professor gave me bad grades for homework and quizzes, but he was amazed to realize that I got the best grade for the final. Our names did not show on the final exam; we had numbers, and I changed my handwriting so that he would not recognize it. That is how I passed the course.

Teresa was not as fortunate. Her philosophy professor, who called himself Machiavel, failed her in her exams two years in a row, because she would not agree to sleep with him. Because of that, she was held back in her studies and finished her undergraduate studies after many years. It was hard for her to find a good job.

Many young women with whom we went to school who did what the professors asked instead of valuing their own intelligence and hard work never succeeded in life. Some never finished high school or college. And those who made it through by exchanging sexual favors for grades often ended up being lazy and negligent employees.

Abuse at work

Many women are sexually abused in their workplaces. Mourai got a job with an apparently kind employer. The next day, the boss scolded her like a child when she made mistakes. The other ladies informed her that she was being prepared by the boss's behavior (a mixture of kindness and roughness) to sleep with him, because all the women who were working in the enterprise had done it. On the third day, she quit the job.

Although things are changing in a positive way, some men still believe that women are inferior and cannot accomplish a better

job than men. Men do not want to receive orders from a woman; therefore, when a woman is the boss, the men neglect their work or do not obey her orders.

Abuse in church

The church is supposed to be a haven for God's children, but, unfortunately, that is not always the case. Some of the abuse I have described as happening in school settings also happens in churches. Women are taken advantage of by those who are in charge and by others. In youth groups and choirs, young women are lured into sexual activities by men who seek to satisfy their appetites.

During my time as a war refugee, I taught Sunday school and taught teenage girls to keep themselves pure. One day, one of them told me that the other teacher told them that, if they did not have sex, they would get sick. I told her that, when I got married, I was thirty-three years old and a virgin. I explained that she will not be sick for keeping herself pure. I could see relief in her eyes and joy in her face.

A young mother in that church confided to me that the pastor had promised her that, if she agreed to have sex with him, she would be spiritually blessed and things would improve between her and her husband. I was able to tell her that the Bible states otherwise and exhorted her to stay away from that pastor.

Other women have experienced rape. Rose had a beautiful voice and loved to sing in the church choir. She was slender and of a beautifully dark complexion. After evening choir practice, young women were entrusted to brothers in Christ to walk them home. That day, Rose was in the care of a brother who "liked her." Since Rose wanted to obey the Lord and remain pure, this brother had never gotten the opportunity to sleep with her. As the brother was walking Rose home, he stopped by his own home to "pick up something." He asked Rose to come in his room, and Rose declined. But he insisted, promising that it would take only a moment. The children were playing outside and his mother was cooking, so Rose reasoned that it would be safe. As soon as Rose stepped in the room, however, he locked the door and started to rape her. Rose screamed with all her might; the mother banged at the door for him to open, but he did not. When Rose told me her story, I could not believe it, because she was a vibrant and joyful Christian. Wherever did she get that strength? She found healing in Christ through forgiveness.

Women in war

From 1999 to 2000, I found myself a war refugee. The plight of people in war-torn areas is a very miserable one. But the predicament of women is even more fragile by the very fact that they are subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Because of the chaos caused by fighting, many people run from their homes to places of "safety." Most of the time, people think that their flight is only temporary, and that after a few days or a week they will be able to come back to their beloved homes.

Most people take only a few things and a little food to subsist for a few days. Then days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years.

When we left our home in January 1999, pushing my father in a wheelbarrow, we thought that we would have to flee only for a few days, but it was twenty months before we would come back to our home, finding it in ruins. We walked miles and miles, from forest to villages and villages to forest, trying to find a safe place. Children as young as three or four walked alongside adults. I had to carry my sixteen-month-old toddler on my back and a few things on my head. Walking was a rough exercise for all, especially for pregnant women. We slept in abandoned schools, hospitals, or churches on dirt floors. Hygienic conditions are very precarious, especially for women. During war, there is no privacy, no pads for menstruation, and no real soap to clean oneself.

In these conditions of insecurity and flight, women are responsible for the care of children. They fetch food to protect husbands, brothers, and sons who are tracked down to be killed or dragged into the militia. I remember the day my brother and I walked for miles to buy food at a market. I did not want him to go alone for fear of him being shot even by our own men, and he did not want me going alone for fear of me being raped. So we walked together, putting our lives in God's hand. Our few coins could not buy all the things we needed, but God heard our prayer for protection.

Many women and girls sell themselves for food (sardines, cookies), soap, money, and passports. Adele craved to eat some sardines. So when a militiaman approached her to give her something to eat in exchange for sex, she agreed. She got her sardines, but also a venereal disease. In fact, she confided in tears that, when the young man was naked, she saw that his penis was full of wounds and pus. She could not go back on her words, especially because his gun was right there, and the militiamen were on drugs. In exchange for something nicer to eat that day, she got a sexual disease that could have led to her death.

People use rape systematically as a weapon to humiliate their enemies. It dehumanizes women and humiliates them to the fullest degree. Women are raped in front of their children, parents, husbands, and others, and later may be disowned by parents, abandoned by their husbands, and left sick with HIV/AIDS.

We were in a small village called Moubotsi, resting before we started walking again. A young woman originally from the north (but living long in the south) was being hidden, because our people, from the south, were at war with the northerners. This young woman was innocent. She happened to be with our group, because she was separated from her family. Then word got out that we had an "infiltrator." One night, a group of young southern militia came to the village and raped that woman badly. We were all powerless in front of their guns and noise. The pain and cries of that young lady kept ringing in our ears for days.

Women in countries like the tiny nation of the Republic of Congo have been overlooked. Many Americans do not even know that this country exists. But, the local and international church can help address the plight of women in such countries.

Editor's note: The following are a few of the ways the church can help:

- Becoming educated on the global plight of women, especially in war zones
- Praying for us regularly and as specifically as possible
- Working locally through such organizations as the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, International Council of the World Evangelical Fellowship, World Council of Churches, Lausanne network, etc., to encourage us to create a joint ecclesiastical and governmental campaign to raise the status of women to that of a national treasure to be cherished, nurtured, and defended, as in teaching boys curricula built on such slogans as, "Our women are our greatest national resource—protect them as a first priority"
- Raising national consciousness through the churches' encouraging community disapproval of abuse, since the extended family is our greatest local resource
- Implementing systemic, systematic marriage counseling with more careful vetting procedures for prospective husbands, including identifying and reeducating potential spouse abusers, before one performs a marriage
- Actively calling for reform in schools, churches, businesses, sacred organizations, and secular private and governmental agencies, implementing effective sexual harassment policies with mandatory fines and jail terms for convicted abusers
- Reforming the courts by eliminating the practice of granting divorce only with the husband's consent
- Requesting United Nations monitoring of war practices that violate "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Proclaimed by the United Nations on 10 December 1948" and other such globally ratified documents in regard to the treatment of non-combatant women
- Creating special interest groups and lobbies among Christians to focus long-term on eliminating abuse of women throughout the society by working to ensure each of these reforms is continuing to take place

Notes

1. All names have been changed for the sake of privacy.

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Book Review: *The Journey Back to Eden*

By Glen G. Scorgie (Zondervan, 2005)

REVIEWED BY DAWN LINDHOLM

One scholar stated, “You can’t learn something you think you already know.” In light of this proposal, Dr. Glen G. Scorgie’s book on relational harmony between men and women will enlighten only those who do not think they already have the right answer. The book is for those who hold Scripture in highest regard while also admitting that many issues, including gender issues, are not presented in clear black-and-white answers. Understanding Scripture and the movement of the Holy Spirit is a daunting task that Scorgie approaches with humility while admitting that, no matter how careful we try to be, our own cultural lenses may skew or blind us to the embedded and implicit truths of God. Readers who understand the complexity of the issue will appreciate how the author synthesizes the disciplines of history, sociology, and biblical hermeneutics to prove an egalitarian perspective.

With clarity, the book takes the reader on an historical journey from Bible times through church history to the present. The author does an impressive job in anticipating the readers’ concerns and questions. Every time an argument seems weak, Scorgie brings up the weakness and addresses it effectively. He convinces readers that there is a movement toward greater inclusiveness, which he calls the “trajectory of the Spirit.” With evangelical Christians arguing over what is “traditional,” this book reminds us that what we now consider “traditional” may in fact be a very modern construct. Scorgie traces the broadening movement of the Holy Spirit in relational harmony based on the Trinitarian relationship of God and how to apply that to human relations. The orthodox ontological equality within the Godhead and the temporary state of the subordination of the Son to the Father are seen as key to a true understanding of the issue.

The issue of slavery is one of the examples of the trajectory of the Spirit that Scorgie uses to justify his thesis of an ongoing movement of liberation. In Bible times, slavery was a culturally acceptable institution. Jesus did not challenge it, nor did most societies

through much of history. In fact, Southern evangelical Christians fought to keep American slavery in practice through the nineteenth century using and quoting the Bible to justify their position. Now we are in the twenty-first century, and the vast majority of us would not tolerate even the idea of slavery, let alone practice it ourselves.

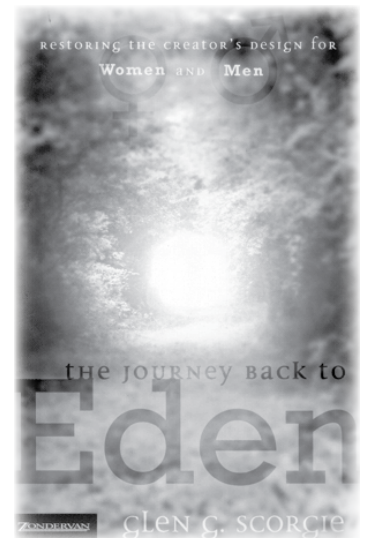
The Journey Back to Eden is written in a style that non-theologians are able to understand, yet it is not a simplistic assessment or explanation of the challenges facing the church of today

on gender issues and stereotyping. As a woman in ministry, I struggle on the journey from feeling like a second-class citizen in the church. Many churches in my past have made male-only leadership a sacred truth by claiming that “God said so,” and for many it is an inalterable truth because it came from the pulpit. But the problem is that it indeed came from the man in the pulpit and not from the Bible.

The Journey Back to Eden is a clear, engaging book for those who are willing to take the journey and those who find they have already begun the journey toward full inclusion of men and women in the kingdom of God. The book calls the church to gender equality and mutual respect. It gives hope to those who struggle with the issue and encouragement to those who already believe in the full inclusion of women.

I recommend this book to individuals who are beginning to question contemporary church traditions regarding men and women. The book is written, at times, in a winsome format in which readers feel like they are taking a personal journey with Scorgie from humanity’s beginnings in Eden to present times. The vignettes of discussions with other people create a space in which readers engage in the conversation. While the issue is a complex one, Scorgie has the ability to structure his argument/apologetic in a form that simply clarifies the major objectives and concerns. It would be a superb book for small groups, as each chapter ends with suggested discussion questions.

With evangelical Christians arguing over what is “traditional,” this book reminds us that what we now consider “traditional” may in fact be a very modern construct.



DAWN LINDHOLM holds degrees from Bethel University, Bethel Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She is an itinerant Bible teacher for many San Diego County churches. She is currently teaching her series “So Many Marys: All at One Time” and “When Women Are Priests: The Implications of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers.”

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Annual Membership Fee (all fees are in U.S. dollars)

Please check one:

United States Members

	1 Year	3 Years
Individual	☐ \$45	☐ \$120
Household	☐ \$65	☐ \$170
Low Income	☐ \$25	☐ N/A
Subscriptions*	☐ \$40	☐ \$115

International Members

	1 Year	3 Years
Individual	☐ \$55	☐ \$145
Household	☐ \$75	☐ \$190
Low Income	☐ \$34	☐ N/A
Subscriptions*	☐ \$49	☐ \$140

*Does not include membership benefits.

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CBE is an exempt organization as described in IRC Sec. 501(c)3 and as such donations may qualify as a charitable contributions where allowed by law.

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Please mail or fax this form to:

Christians for Biblical Equality

122 W Franklin Ave, Suite 218 ♦ Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451

PHONE: (612) 872-6898 ♦ FAX: (612) 872-6891

E-MAIL: cbe@cbeinternational.org

JOIN ONLINE: www.cbeinternational.org

Christians for Biblical Equality

Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) is an organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of believers of all racial and ethnic groups, and all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of scripture as reflected in Galatians 3:28.

Injustice is an abuse of power, taking from others what God has given them: their dignity, their freedom, their resources, and even their very lives. CBE also recognizes that prohibiting individuals from exercising their God-given gifts to further his kingdom constitutes injustice in a form that impoverishes the body of Christ and its ministry in the world at large. CBE accepts the call to be part of God's mission in opposing injustice as required in Scriptures such as Micah 6:8.

CORE VALUES ♦ We believe the Bible teaches the equality of women and men. We believe God has given each person gifts to be used for the good of Christ's kingdom. We believe Christians are to develop and exercise their God-given gifts in home, church, and society. We believe the Bible teaches that Christians are to oppose injustice.

MISSION STATEMENT ♦ CBE equips believers by affirming the biblical truth about equality and justice. Thus all believers, without regard to gender, ethnicity, and class, are free and encouraged to use their God-given gifts in families, ministries, and communities.

CORE PURPOSE ♦ To communicate broadly the biblical truth that men and women are equally responsible to act justly and use their God-given gifts to further Christ's kingdom.

ENVISIONED FUTURE ♦ CBE envisions a future where all believers will be encouraged to use their gifts for God's glory and missional purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

Statement of Faith

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.

We believe in the unity and trinity of God, eternally existing as three equal persons.

We believe in the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.

We believe in the sinfulness of all persons. One result of sin is shattered relationships with God, others, and self.

We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are 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 in the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

We believe in the equality and essential dignity of men and women of all ethnicities, ages, and classes. We recognize that all persons are made in the image of God and are to reflect that image in the community of believers, in the home, and in society.

We believe that men and women are to diligently develop and use their God-given gifts for the good of the home, church, and society.

We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as God's design.

We believe that, as mandated by the Bible, men and women are to oppose injustice.

CBE Membership

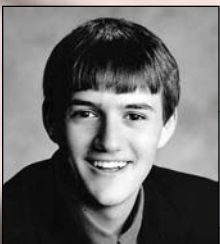
CBE membership is available to those who support CBE's Statement of Faith. Members receive CBE's quarterly publications, *Mutuality* magazine and *Priscilla Papers* journal. Members are eligible for discounts on items from Equality Depot Bookstore, including books, articles, tapes, and videos. Members are also offered discounts on all international CBE conferences.



IRONING

Matthew Robert Erdel

Long ago,
my mother sought
to teach a shirt
to iron itself.
At first,
it took offense
that she would think
it had wrinkles.
But later,
it understood
how she cherished
it so dearly.



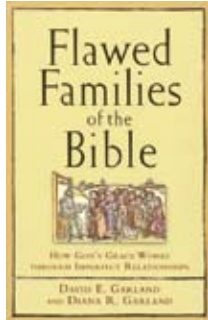
MATTHEW ERDEL is a junior at Bethel College in Indiana, where he is studying philosophy and English. He hopes to continue to study literature in graduate school. He is grateful to his mother and father, whose patient encouragement finally got their son hooked on books.

PHOTO BY JOHN TARANTINO



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CBE members save 15% on books and 50% on CBE-produced recordings
To place your order call 612-872-6898 or visit www.equalitydepot.com



Flawed Families of the Bible **NEW!**

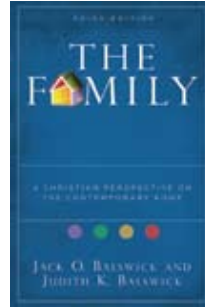
HOW GOD'S GRACE WORKS THROUGH IMPERFECT RELATIONSHIPS

by David E. Garland and Diana R. Garland

The families of the Bible were far from perfect, and not so different in that regard from our imperfect families today. This honest book will inspire and encourage readers with its focus on the overarching theme of hope and grace for families, showing that it is in the "imperfect places" that we can catch a glimpse of grace.

Brazos Press • 240 pages

List \$19.99 • **CBE Member \$16.99**



The Family **NEW!**

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONTEMPORARY HOME

by Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick

This new edition of an egalitarian classic covers every issue that affects family life—marriage, parenting, sexuality, communication, social dynamics, and family life in modern society. *The Family* is a proven comprehensive resource for studying this most established of human institutions.

Baker Academic • 400 pages

List \$24.99 • **CBE Member \$21.24**



Teenage Girls **NEW!**

EXPLORING ISSUES ADOLESCENT GIRLS FACE
AND STRATEGIES TO HELP THEM

by Ginny Olson

With a focus on how to minister to teenage girls, Ginny Olson integrates advice from veteran youth workers as she guides you through the traditional issues people commonly associate with girls, such as eating disorders, self-image issues, and depression, as well as some of the new issues on the rise in girls' lives.

Zondervan • 240 pages

List \$17.99 • **CBE Member \$15.29**



Teenage Guys **NEW!**

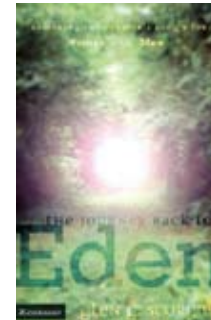
EXPLORING ISSUES ADOLESCENT GUYS FACE
AND STRATEGIES TO HELP THEM

by Steve Gerali

With advice from counselors and veteran youth workers, you'll find helpful suggestions on how to minister to teenage guys and their families. In addition to concepts like mentoring and rites of passage, Dr. Gerali also walks readers through the seven areas of development young guys go through.

Zondervan • 320 pages

List \$17.99 • **CBE Member \$15.29**



**See review
on page 29**

The Journey Back to Eden

RESTORING THE CREATOR'S DESIGN
FOR WOMEN AND MEN

by Glen G. Scorgie

Based on a high view of Scripture, Scorgie takes a fresh look at the biblical landscape. Join the journey through the pages of Scripture and across history to see the trajectory of the Spirit toward creating gender equality, freedom, and mutuality.

Zondervan • 224 pages

List \$16.99 • **CBE Member \$14.44**

Your purchases help support CBE's ministry—Thank you!

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