

PRISCILLA

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Papers

"PRISCILLA AND AQUILLA
INSTRUCTED APOLLOS MORE
PERFECTLY IN THE WAY OF THE LORD"
(ACTS 18)

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You may have noticed that beginning in the Summer 2001 issue of PRISCILLA PAPERS a new logo appeared on this page, that of the Evangelical Press Association indicating our membership. In some ways, deciding to join this professional association of Christian publications was a bold step for the CBE board, aligning ourselves with well over 300 periodicals, journals, and individuals who make up EPA.

There is little question that EPA encourages the highest standards of Christian journalism, both ethically and technically. And it is to this end that the organization annually sponsors two contests that offer members the opportunity to submit their publication and individual articles, features, and graphics to independent judges who choose what they see as the best representatives in a given category. This is not about "bragging rights" but an opportunity to learn what is already being done with excellence and where improvements can be made. (I well understand this dynamic, having served for several years on the EPA Awards Committee, two as chair.) Overall, I believe, the contests have provided a means for editors and designers to see their efforts through critical, albeit neutral, eyes—and improve their work to the glory of God. The results in Christian publications over the years are evident.

In this our first year of EPA membership, PRISCILLA PAPERS entered three of the twenty-four Higher Goals categories for 2001, representing individual editorial and design elements—and won two awards! At EPA's annual convention in May, a First Place Poetry award went to "Who Was She?" by Patricia Donohue-Carey (Winter 2001), and a Fifth Place in the First-Person category was given to Fun-

mi Josephine Para-Mallam's "Why? Oh Why Am I a Woman?" (Fall 2001). Of Funmi's work, the judge wrote: "[T]his takes the reader into this area of tension between genders and makes God the winner." We couldn't ask for more!

Besides the solid offering of articles in this issue, I would call your attention to an extra: an index of volumes 13–15, bound into the center for easy access and pull-out. One of our CBE "mothers," Alvera Mickelsen, lovingly put this index together, and I hope you (and all the librarians out there!) will find it truly useful.

And don't miss the good articles you will find here. Gilbert Bilezikian's exposition on biblical community is choice, as are articles by Douglas Groothuis and Alan Padgett, the latter a more complete explanation of what CBE believes the Bible says about equality. Sandwiched between these is a short piece by U.S. Army Reserves chaplain Rachel Coggins, who was told by her denomination that she could no longer serve in her ordained capacity.

Finally, this photo of our president, Mimi Haddad, is from an exceptional article in my local newspaper, *The Ledger* (Lakeland, FL), written following Mimi's April visit to Central Florida. She encour-



aged our fledgling chapter, and made many significant new contacts on behalf of CBE.

Have a wonderful summer!

CAROL R. THIESSEN
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Biblical Community *versus* Gender-Based Hierarchy

Understanding God's definition of the church as the community of oneness.

GILBERT BILEZIKIAN

THE MOST COMPELLING PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD SHOULD BE THE FACT THAT THE Christian faith has been able to survive twenty centuries of abuse inflicted upon it by the church. On all counts, the church should have shriveled and died several times during its tortuous history. Despite clear directives for beliefs and practices, assigned to it by its divine founder despite easy access to God's inscripturated revelation, despite the ever-available guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church seems to be hell-bent on losing its way and becoming sidetracked down paths of self-destruction.

For about a millennium of its history, the church lost the memory of the locus of divine revelation. While the text of the Bible was slowly fading from crumbling parchments hidden in the musty recesses of moss-grown monasteries, clerics scurried about from pillar to post trying to extract divine wisdom from the writings of antique philosophers and from the bewildering confusion of one another's teachings. It was only a few centuries ago that some noble adventurers of the Spirit stumbled upon Holy Writ and delivered from oblivion the very Scripture that had given the church her life.

In about the same length of time, the church misplaced, like a lost treasure, its most sacred entrustment: the way of salvation. It forgot the magnificence of divine grace and, shamefully, attempted to replace God's gift with the miserable strivings of humans. To the miraculous achievement of the Cross, it substituted systems of salvation by works that never worked. Less than five centuries ago some sons of the church, driven to despair by the need of their own souls, dared to peer into the newly recovered Word of God to find again, for themselves and for generations to come, the free access to divine grace provided by the Cross in all its power and splendor.

At the dawn of this third millennium of its existence, there is evidence that the church is coming to the realization that, through the vicissitudes of its turbulent history, it has also lost its biblical identity as community. Across denominations, clergy are compelled to take notice of the dissatisfaction of their constituencies with the rigid and sterile institutional structures that have stifled and replaced authentic communal life. Christians read the New Testament accounts of the life of the early church when it was thriving under the fresh impact of the Spirit. They discover the biblical definition of the church as a vibrant center of creative, dynamic, outreaching, saving, and helping

Christian love. They compare such accounts with what has happened to their own churches, they shake their heads in bewilderment, and they feel cheated.

This article is intended to cut through traditional hermeneutical stratifications in order to draw from Scripture itself God's definition of the church as the community of oneness. The argument will be based on an examination of the biblical data, first with reference to God's original design for community at the time of Creation; then, in terms of the disruption caused by the Fall; and, more significantly, as pertains to the life of God's new community, the church.

The plurality in oneness of the community in heaven becomes reflected in the plurality in oneness on earth.

Community in Creation

The Creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 show that God's design for community was based on three struc-

tures, all reflecting aspects of the divine image invested in human life. First is the ontological structure of oneness, which constitutes the very essence of the Godhead. The second is the relational structure that bonded the original couple in an association of mutual servanthood. The third is the structure of ministry that involved both humans in the fulfillment of the service mandates assigned to them by God within a relation of complementarity of gifts devoid of any differentiation based on rank or gender.

The structure of oneness. The God revealed in the Christian Scripture is, in essence, plurality in oneness: three persons in one being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all eternally bonded together in the original community of oneness, in the embrace of the interpersonal dynamics that the Bible describes best when it summarily affirms that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

Because God is love, he is a giver. When he gives, he does it on the scale of infinity. He creates billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars distant thousands of

light years from each other. But this all-encompassing love can also zoom itself down into the minutia of a privileged planet that will host his supreme creational achievement: beings made in his image, according to his likeness. As the first phase of his grand project, he creates only one. With tender care, he gives birth to the man as a living being and sets him in a perfect environment, custom-designed for him.

However, the aloneness of the man is “not good.” By himself, he cannot reflect the interpersonal plurality of the Creator and, thus, be his image. So, from the one, God draws another, formed from the same human stock, differentiated according to gender but bonded in oneness (Gen. 2:24). It is only when both are created that the “image” becomes reality (1:27). The plurality in oneness of the community in heaven becomes reflected in the plurality in oneness on earth.

The structure of servant relations. The second structure of the order of creation concerns the relationships that prevailed between the members of the community of oneness. Since one of the functions of the “image” was to mirror in human life the features of the community above, relations within the Godhead provided the model for relationships within the community of humans.

Because God is love, the Scriptures describe interactions between the persons of the Trinity as relations of mutual deference and reciprocal reverence. The Father glorifies the Son; the Son glorifies the Father; and the Spirit glorifies both. The Father gives everything he has to the Son, including all authority in heaven and on earth and the name which is above every name. In return, the Son gives everything he has and is to the Father, including his status of equality with the Father as he humbles himself to the point of subjecting himself to death. To love is to abdicate self-interest in order to submit oneself in servanthood. This is how the persons in the Godhead relate to each other, because God is love.

Nothing less could have been expected of humans created to image the God of love. Their relationship is described as a cycle of mutual servanthood and reciprocal submission. As “helper,” Eve was created for the purpose of rescuing Adam from the “not good” situation of being alone. She became servant to him by helping him become with her the community God had intended to create with both (Gen. 2:18). In turn, he became her servant as he died to himself by going into a deep sleep in order to bring life to her as God reached close to his heart and used part of him to give her being (2:21–22).

This relation of mutuality is made even more explicit in the declaration of oneness (2:24). Projecting toward the future, man is described as leaving father and mother to gravitate toward his wife and to cling to her in order for them to become one flesh, one body, a single entity. The relative positions of the two individuals referenced in this text are highly significant. The woman is at the center, the fixed point of reference. The man breaks away from his

biological family and approaches her to cling to her in order for the two of them to create oneness together. Two observations are in order.

First, when this text was penned, the practice was exactly the opposite. It was the bride who moved away from her parental home and who attached herself to her husband under his father’s patriarchal roof or expanded tent. Second, in every culture, it is the lesser person who displaces him- or herself to go to the more highly placed individual. For instance, a king who must have dealings with a peasant will not leave his throne and chase after him in his hovel. He will summon the peasant to present himself at the palace. In the text, the man is in motion while the woman remains stable at the center. Obvious matriarchal implications could be drawn from this text. However, in a community of servants, no one plays power games. The lesson is that the relative positions could have been reversed and it would not have made a whit of difference because, among servants, the only appropriate relationship is one of mutual submission.

This lesson is addressed even more emphatically in the next verse as the climactic conclusion of the accounts of Creation. The man and the woman were both naked, and yet, not ashamed of it. Nakedness was a reason for shame. Yet, they were impervious to it (2:25). Throughout the cultures of the Bible, nakedness was viewed as a demeaning condition because it denoted low status. The indigent, beg-

gars, prisoners, and captives went naked, and certainly, servants and slaves. The higher on the social ladder one was positioned, the

more refined and abundant the clothes became. Clothes served as a status symbol.

Jesus, as servant, took off his garment and washed the disciples’ feet with a towel tied around him. The next day, as he achieved his ultimate task of servanthood on the cross, he was stripped of his clothes. Likewise, the relationship between the couple in the garden was one of mutual servanthood as indicated by the fact that they were both naked. They were not ashamed, because to relate to one another as servant was Godlike. Such behavior was consistent with the Creator’s purpose for them to image the servant relations that prevailed within the Godhead.

Significantly, it was when sin entered their relationship and the eyes of both were opened to the awareness that their status had changed vis-à-vis God and, therefore, each other, that they felt compelled to cover themselves (3:7). Sin annihilates relationships of servanthood. However, in the restoration of all things, the redeemed will be symbolically clothed with garments of royalty, naked no more, since they shall reign with Christ forever, still servants, but enthroned with him (Rev. 3:5, 21).

The structure of ministry. The third constituent structure of community established by God within the order of creation was that of service, the accomplishment of ministries entrusted by God to humans. Because God who is community loves community, he ordained the

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expansion of community on earth. The first and most important instruction prescribed by God to the humans was the mandate to propagate community, the order to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth (1:28). God, being absolute, cannot reproduce himself. But the image can and must. If community is good, the more the better.

The second divine order, the dominion mandate, was a consequence of the first. In order for the physical environment to sustain the expansion of community, it had to be carefully managed. Therefore, the humans were commanded to subdue the earth, to have dominion over its fauna and to steward its flora (1:28–30).

How were those two tasks to be accomplished? One method might have been to distribute them on the basis of roles. For instance, the woman could have been assigned the domestic mandate. Her primary service would have been to have children, to raise them and prepare them to fill the earth while the man fulfilled the dominion mandate. He would be the one to rule the earth.

But since this is not how the Godhead functions, neither did the image. The Scripture shows that, whatever the endeavor, all the members of the Trinity are in it together. Although God the Father was at the forefront of the work of Creation, neither the Son nor the Spirit was excluded from it. When the ministry of redemption became necessary, the Son was at the forefront. But both the Father and the Spirit were participants in it. And when the work of establishing the church and sanctifying believers began, the Holy Spirit was at the forefront, but neither the Father nor the Son was excluded from it. They are always in it together.

The divine design for humans was the same. The two mandates were emphatically assigned to both together (1:28). Assuredly, the contributions of each to the common tasks differed according to their best abilities. But the fulfillment of both mandates was a shared ministry, pointedly nondifferentiated on the basis of preassigned roles or according to some presumed hierarchical order. Such notions are totally absent from the text.

The idea of a hierarchical complementarity between the man and the woman is sometimes imported into the account of Creation through the manipulation of the word *helper* in Genesis 2:18 and 20. This word is used in the text exclusively with reference to the fact that it was not good for the man to be alone. He needed a “helper” to form with her the community of oneness that God had intended to establish from the beginning (2:24). Despite this precisely qualified use of the word *helper*, it has often been wrenched out of its context and given an application totally foreign to its meaning.

According to this approach, God would have taken pity on Adam’s loneliness and provided him charitably with an underling, a pleasant convenience to complement his life, a little assistant he could boss around. Quite differently, the text teaches that God formed Eve to rescue Adam from

being noncommunity and thus to become together with her the plurality in oneness that would reflect on earth the image of the Godhead in heaven who is quintessentially plurality in one being.

This reading of the word *helper* as *rescuer* is strongly attested through its use in the Old Testament. The word appears nineteen times from Genesis to the Minor Prophets and mainly in the Psalms with reference to God as “helper,” denoting not subordination or domesticity but precisely the opposite: one who can rescue from a position of strength and superior advantage. In this case, the woman helped the man to become what God had intended for both to be together: the community of oneness on earth.

In clear, forceful, positive strokes the first two chapters of Genesis describe the community on earth as God wanted it to be and to function. The three structures that defined community are sharply delineated: oneness, servant relations, and nonhierarchical complementarity in shared ministry.

Totally lacking in the order of creation is any notion of a structure of hierarchy between the man and the woman. The order of creation was replete with hierarchical stratifications. God’s sovereign rights over the humans are explicitly stated in the text. He dictated their activity (1:28–30) and the limits of human freedom (2:17). Conversely, the humans’ rule over creation is carefully detailed. It extended to the fish, the birds, the cattle, wild animals, and even

to creeping creatures (1:26, 28). However, within this authority-intensive structuring of the order of creation, conspicuously absent is any reference to an authority link between the man and the woman. Had

such a thing existed, it would be at least as worthy of mention as the humans’ rule over birds, fish, cattle, and creeping creatures. But it simply is not there.

The reasons for the total absence of an authority link between the man and the woman in the order of creation have been surveyed above. The biblical definition of oneness precluded such differentiations of rank. Relations of mutual servanthood entailed attitudes of reciprocal submission that were incompatible with distinctions of rank. Partnership in service was a harmonious venture in cooperation that required nothing more than shared leadership. This remained true until sin entered the world.

The destruction of community

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not placed in the Garden as a malevolent device intended to test the humans, to cause them to trip and fall. On the contrary, the tree was provided to protect their greatest blessings: their communion with God and their community together.

The humans had already the knowledge of good since everything around them had been created “very good.” But, lurking in the Garden, there was also the potential for evil. The tree functioned as an alarm signal. As long as they recognized and respected the goodness of their relation to

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God, they would remain in communion with him, and consequently, in community with each other. However, should they rebel and reject the order of creation, should they deny God's sovereignty over them and aspire to become "like God" by substituting for it their own puny sovereignty, God's creation order would become disrupted, their communion with God would cease, and community would be shattered. They would be on their own.

Once the humans declared their independence from God by violating his will, their oneness exploded and they found themselves like two strangers in a park, fearful and suspicious, protecting themselves from each other by accusing one another. The community they had enjoyed degenerated into enmity, alienation, and isolation. Oneness became aloneness. Not only were they on their own, separated from God, the source of their lives, and therefore subject to death, but each of them was also on his own and on her own. The desolation was complete.

In the wake of the great rebellion, the God-designed relation of mutual servanthood and of reciprocal submission that had prevailed between the humans gave way to hierarchy. One became ruler and the other subject, a condition caused by sin and one that had not been their experience prior to the Fall (3:16).

The primary source of the life of the man was God. Since he had been taken from the ground, the secondary source of his life was the ground. When sin separated him from God, he became severed from the primary source of his life. He fell back for survival on the secondary life system, the ground. He became slave to the ground. He would have to toil over it to acquire bread by the sweat of his face. The ground would respond with thorns and thistles. It would eventually open its mouth and swallow the man's being. Sin had reversed the terms of rulership. Prior to the Fall, the man had ruled the earth. Now the ground ruled over his being, and he had become slave to it.

As her Creator, the primary source of the woman's life was God. When that relation failed because of her disconnection from God, she could only fall back on the secondary source of her life. She had been taken from the man who, in the meantime, had become slave to the ground. She became slave to the slave. Her heart's desire was still focused on her husband, making her yearn for the oneness that had been theirs. Instead, he would rule over her. Under the destructive impact of sin, the creation order had become an ugly ruler-to-subject hierarchy.

It did not take long for the man to assert his rulership. Before the Fall, he had joyfully accepted the beautiful name that had been given by God to his companion as he recognized that she should be called *woman* (2:22-23). After the Fall, he took it upon himself to give her another name. This name recognized her nobility as life-giver in a world now pervaded by death. However, by giving her the name *Eve*, he also reduced her essential identity to just one of her

functions, as the "mother" of all living (3:20). The absence of any evidence that she had been consulted about this change illustrates the workings of hierarchy. Her lover had become her ruler.

A third disaster ensued from the Fall to confirm the destruction of community as it had been created by God. It was the loss of the structure of shared ministry. Prior to the Fall, the man and the woman had been entrusted together with the dual responsibility of populating the earth and of ruling over it.

The Fall destroyed the partnership. The man and the woman became functionally dissociated. The task of ruling the earth became the purview of the man. However, whereas prior to the Fall they were both to exercise dominion over creation, now the man would strive to eke out subsistence from the recalcitrant ground, which would eventually prevail and reduce his being to dust.

The mandate to fill the earth and to propagate community had been entrusted to both of them. After the Fall, childbearing became a painful process that the woman would endure alone. And when a reference was made to their progeny, it was designated as her own posterity despite the fact that, according to the Old Testament, it was not women but men who had a posterity (3:15).

The Fall inflicted on God's creation order a threefold dimension of alienation that was not part of it originally. The loss of oneness created the distance of separation as

the man and the woman became disconnected from God and from each other. The loss of mutuality in servanthood created the distance that inevitably results from hierarchy, however benevolent its practice, be-

cause of the divide that unilateral subordination produces in a relation of authority to subordination, of superior rank to inferior position. The loss of authentic complementarity in the fulfillment of God-assigned functions created the distance of separation of tasks on the basis of gender-specific roles. What resulted from the Fall was the grotesque deformation of community as God had created it. All the fallen world could do was to wait for the Redeemer.

Community in redemption

It is in the nature of God never to accept defeat. The humans' attempt to usurp his sovereignty caused the disruption of his grand community project but not its annihilation. Through the institutions of the old covenant, God carefully prepared the intervention in human history of the Redeemer. He would die tragically and rise triumphantly for the dual purpose of releasing his new kind of life to individuals in desperate need of salvation and to draw them together in the renewed community, to the full measure of God's original intentions.

The structure of oneness. As the season came for the Son to surrender his life on behalf of his followers, his supreme expressed desire for them was to reconstitute

The loss of mutuality in servanthood created the distance that inevitably results from hierarchy, however benevolent its practice.

again on earth the image of the oneness that defines the nature of the Godhead in heaven. The achievement of such oneness was for Jesus the climactic outcome of his redemptive ministry. Everything that the Father and the Son had invested in his ministry was provided for the purpose of reproducing among believers on earth the same oneness that prevails within the Godhead (John 17:11, 21–23).

In Christ Jesus, those whom the Fall had cast far off from each other could now be brought near through the blood of Christ. In his flesh, he made them all one by demolishing the walls of hostility that separated them. With them, he created in himself one new humanity by reconciling them to God in one body through the Cross (Eph. 2:13–16). According to such texts, Jesus did not die only to save sinners. Jesus died to save sinners so that they could be integrated together in oneness. According to the New Testament, the reconstitution of the community of oneness is to be Christ's ultimate redemptive achievement.

During his ministry and as the outcome of it, Jesus anticipated the full restoration of community as God had willed it in Creation. Christ's frame of reference for the definition of the marriage community was the Scripture that described what God had done "at the beginning" when he "made them male and female" and said, "for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matt. 19:4–5). Jesus emphatically repudiated the effects of the Fall on human community and affirmed the original goodness of God's Creation plan. Of the husband and wife relation he said, "They are no longer two but one flesh." And he absolutely forbade anyone from tampering with this community of oneness established by God himself (v. 6).

The Fall had devastated the oneness of marriage to such an extent that the Mosaic legislation had conceded to the rulers the dubious privilege of divorcing their wives at will without demonstrable cause and without right of appeal for the victims (Deut. 24:1–2). This practice was a sinister violation of the community of oneness that had been originally established by God (Gen. 2:24). It demeaned women, reducing them to the status of whores passed around among hard-hearted, adulterous men (Matt. 19:8–9; 5:31–32). Jesus restored women to the position of equal dignity with men by revoking vehemently the practice of this unilateral, no-fault claim to divorce. He validated oneness as the inalterable norm for husband-wife relations (Matt. 19:6).

Christ also expected this oneness to become the defining characteristic of relations within the church community. During that harrowing hour of menacing distress, when the drama of redemption was about to reach its climactic crescendo on the cross, the driving obsession of Jesus was the making of the new community. In a supplication to the Father that burnt itself into the memory of the disciples, the Son, insistently and repeatedly, asked that the same state of oneness that prevails within the Godhead be extended to

the fellowship of all his followers (John 17:11; 20–23).

As a result, when the church was established under the fresh impact of Pentecost, the community of believers devoted itself deliberately to the development of *koinonia* (Acts 2:42) with the result that "the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (4:32). The nature and the effects of this state of oneness are amply described in the New Testament.

Differences that would normally be a factor of division among humans become transformed under the impact of their collective identity in Christ into a unitive force that draws all of them into one body and bonds them together as its members (Rom. 12:4–5). Even more graphically, just as the physical body is one whole entity with multiple extensions, so it is with Christ. All the members constitute corporately a body of oneness through the Spirit's activity. They all become united despite ethnic ("Jews or Greeks") and social ("slaves or free") distinctions (1 Cor. 12:12–13). God-generated oneness turns into irrelevance those very differences that cause separation and enmity outside of Christ.

The New Testament draws explicitly the implications of this oneness in Christ to their inevitable conclusion with regard to the issue of gender. All those who through faith in Christ become children of God and are baptized in Christ receive a new identity in Christ ("have put on Christ," Gal. 3: 26–27). As a result, not only are distinctions of ethnicity and social status condemned to irrelevance in

the body of Christ but also the gender distinction (v. 28). Because identity with Christ has primacy over all other characterizations, "there is neither male nor female." This means that the gender difference holds

no more significance than racial or class identifications in defining the workings of the new community.

The rationale for this radical reconstruction of community is explicitly provided in the text "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (v. 28). Biblical oneness transcends all the divisions and discriminations that were brought into the world by the Fall.

This oneness certainly becomes reality for each individual as one comes to "faith in Christ Jesus." But beyond initial integration into the body, oneness pertains also to ministry involvement in the life of the body. The attribute of "oneness" is consistently associated in the New Testament with each believer's participation in ministry on the basis of each one's spiritual gift (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:7–13; Eph. 4:4–8, 11–13). Since functionality pertains to oneness, the biblical text in Galatians 3:28 explicitly declares the gender difference to have become irrelevant for participation in the ministries of the church community.

Christ accepts each individual without regard for ethnicity, class, or gender. In so doing, he sets the model for the manner in which believers are obligated to relate to each other (Rom. 15:7). To be biblical, community requires gender integration at every level and in every dimension of its life.

Jesus emphatically repudiated the effects of the Fall on human community and affirmed the original goodness of God's creation plan.

The structure of servanthood. In order for this oneness to become effective in practice, it was necessary to restore to their original goodness the relations of mutual servanthood that the Fall had corrupted into hierarchy. Throughout his ministry, Jesus endeavored to teach principles that emphasized self-denial and servant-mindedness to those who would form the nucleus of the new community (Matt. 25:14–46; Mark 8:34–38; Luke 9:57–62; 17:7–10; 22:27; etc.). While laying down its foundations, he never established a structure of hierarchy among them or suggested that they should; he never allowed for a court of appeal within or other than the community itself to rule on its own affairs (Matt. 18:15–19).

But the poison of hierarchy generated by the Fall had permeated relationships to such an extent that those very disciples Jesus was training in the ways of servanthood insisted on substituting hierarchy for it. They kept competing among themselves for the highest status (Mark 9:33–37), and for positions of preeminence (10:35–45). To settle the issue once for all times, Jesus drew sharply the basic difference between societal organization in the secular world and in the Christian community.

In the world, greatness arrogates itself authority over others. In the new community, true greatness is expressed in servanthood (10:42–44). By so doing, the community follows the divine model (v. 45). Jesus decisively prohibited the importation into the Christian community of authority-intensive structures of hierarchical leadership. He replaced them with the divine paradigm of leadership as servanthood and mutual submission.

Consequently, there is no mandate and no allowance in the New Testament for one adult believer to hold authority over another adult believer. It simply is not there. Instead, the overall rule calls for mutual submission among all believers out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). He alone, within the community of believers, is worthy of the surrender of their will.

Obviously, this imperative for mutual submission is pointedly pertinent to the husband and wife relationship. Human community began with the couple in the Garden. The Fall wrecked it. Redemption in Christ restores it to the original design of oneness.

Among all the references to the husband and wife relation in the New Testament, the most compelling is the one that addresses the issue of authority. Only once is the word *authority* used to describe the relationship of husband and wife not just as an abstract principle, but also as a matter of practice since the word is couched in its verb form (1 Cor. 7:4). According to this text, “the wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does.” Had the statement stopped there, it would have pertained to the economy of male rulership that resulted from the Fall. But it goes on to affirm emphatically and with stunning symmetry: “Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” Perfect mutuality

can now prevail even at the most basic and representative level of human relationships. Only Christ could have taken in his mighty hands the evil structures of hierarchy spawned by the Fall and crushed them into the shape of a cross.

In Christ, neither the husband nor the wife has ascendancy over the other. In the most significant expression of their union, their relationship is endowed with the dignity of equally shared authority and cooperative leadership. The rationale justifying this redeemed relation is clearly stated: the husband is obligated to his wife’s rights on him in the same measure as she is obligated to his rights on her (v. 3).

Hierarchy has been replaced by a bond of mutual subjection. To make absolutely sure that we understand how this nonhierarchical economy functions in actual practice, a real life application is provided with the example of a decision to be made by a couple, a major decision since it concerns their relationship with God through prayer and to each other in the exercise of their conjugal bond. The decision is to be made consensually and, if there is no agreement, it is not made (v. 5). Neither one of the marriage partners is entitled to impose his or her own will upon the other.

At first sight, this model of mutuality seems to run at variance with the New Testament teaching about the husband’s headship to his wife. But this misunderstanding happens only when *head* is assumed to have in the original language the same meaning it has in modern English when it is figuratively used for leader, boss, or authority.

The headship of Christ, which the New Testament

places in parallel representation to that of husbands, is never defined in terms of Christ’s lordship, leadership, or authority over the church. Christ is always referred to as head “of” or “to” the church, not even once as head “over” the church. His headship is consistently presented as servant provider of fullness and growth to the church (Eph. 1:22–23; 4:15–16; Col. 2:19), as the source or provider of the beginning of its life (Col. 1:18), and as its Savior, which is always a self-sacrificing servant role (Eph. 5:23). In the New Testament, headship means servanthood, not authority. As wives submit themselves to their husbands in servanthood, formerly ruler husbands also act as servants to their wives within the relational context of mutual submission (5:21) and self-giving love (5:25–30).

The New Testament prescriptions for community relations among believers do not stop with married life. They apply as well to the broader framework of the local church. Christ’s thundering prohibition against structuring Christian community hierarchically was aimed, in particular, at his followers who were only too willing to allow their own “great men to exercise authority over them,” or worse, to aspire to act themselves as such. Addressing himself to future leaders of the church, Jesus exhorted them to shun

Only Christ could have taken in his mighty hands the evil structures of hierarchy spawned by the Fall and crushed them into the shape of a cross.

hierarchical positions in order to function as servants (Matt. 20:25-28). The corresponding rule of mutual submission excludes no members of the community, not even its leaders, from acting in servanthood (Eph. 5:21).

For this reason, the ministry of leadership in the local church is always a shared function according to the New Testament. It is never committed to a single individual but to a plurality of leaders, chosen for their gifts and not just to fill positions, who may act with authority only when they act corporately and never singly, as individuals.

In true servant fashion, the normal mode for exercising such leadership is through teaching, exhortation, and persuasion. In the New Testament, recourse to the use of authority is a measure of last resort, kept for intervention in crisis or disciplinary situations. In New Testament definition, the function of leadership is servanthood-driven, not authority-intensive.

The New Testament model for leadership is never a matter of filling positions or assuming titles, often borrowed from pagan corporate structures such as “senior (!) pastor” or derived from mistranslations of the biblical text such as “ruling (!) elders” (1 Tim. 5:17, corrected in the NIV). Consequently, leadership in the church is more a servant function than a male prerogative.

Such leadership functions are not executive in the manner of a managerial team but rather supportive of the work of the congregation who are the real executors of ministry. Leaders are merely equip-

pers who train, motivate, and encourage the congregation to do “the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). The model is not a top-down pyramid of authority but an inverted pyramid with the leadership teams at the bottom, providing support and incentive for the members of the congregation to fulfill their calling. This biblical definition of leadership as a nonhierarchical servant ministry renders considerations of gender irrelevant for its practitioners.

The structure of ministry. The radical restoration of community to the measure of God’s original purposes in creation also required the reconstitution of its ministry structures on the pattern of authentic complementarity. The overwhelming mass of evidence in the New Testament indicates that nothing less was expected than total participation in the ministries of the church of its constituency on the basis of spiritual gifts made available by the Holy Spirit for that very purpose to each individual member. No one was excused or excluded from participation.

The Spirit came in power upon the followers of the risen Christ on the Day of Pentecost to transform them into his church. The first proclamation made that day to inaugurate the birth of the new community concerned ministry in the nascent church. Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter declared that, because of the new availability of the Spirit, both men and women were now called to fulfill the highest form of

ministry by speaking forth the word of God on his behalf (Acts 2:16-18).

As the church established itself in Jerusalem and beyond, it remained true to this vision. Both men and women answered the call to ministry as community workers (9:36, 39), as teachers of the word (18:26), and as prophets (21:9). Exhortations to use fully their spiritual gifts were addressed to all members of the body without any reference to exclusions on the basis of gender (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11; Eph. 4:6-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Despite the predictable diversity among the members of the body, no individual was permitted to invoke such differences to shrink away from involvement in ministry (1 Cor. 12:14-20). More importantly, no one had the right to cite such differences in order to prevent others from participating in the ministry to which they were called (v. 21). The ministry of the church called for the total mobilization of its constituency. No excuses and no exclusions were tolerated. Consequently, instructions forbidding women to accede to ministry are completely absent from those documents.

On this basis, both men and women could “pray or prophesy.” They could lead congregational worship and speak the word of God irrespective of gender except for the difference in the women’s head attire (11: 4-5), itself a requirement that was soon relinquished (v. 15). The intent was to allow all to prophesy so that the whole body could learn and be encouraged (14:31; Col. 3:15-16).

Judaizing false teachers brought confusion to the exuberant church in Corinth by forbidding women to minister and by consigning them to absolute silence

claiming for their teaching the practice of some older anti-community churches and a law that did not exist (14:33-35). Paul’s angry retort was sarcastic rejection of their teaching. Did such troublemakers invent the word of God, which they claimed to cite? Were they the only privileged ones to have received such deviant instructions from God (vv. 36-40)? (For a fuller treatment of this passage, see Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, Baker, pp. 144-53).

The New Testament imperative for Christian service rings like a vibrant clarion call for total involvement of all the members of the community in the work of the local church through the enabling of the Spirit. However, the New Testament also presents one notably different model of ministry that stands in sharp contradiction to this norm of total participation. This alternative model, found in the Pastoral Epistles, is rigidly restrictive. It excludes from active involvement not only women but also most of the constituency of the local church.

The Pastoral Epistles were written to churches in a state of terminal crisis. Both 1 Timothy and Titus were addressed to churches that had been infiltrated by false teachers whose heresies had created turmoil and dissensions far worse than any disorders that had occurred in other churches such as in Corinth, Colossea, or Galatia. In order to save these churches from self-destruction, Paul had sent two of his disciples, Timothy and Titus, as interim trouble-

Leadership in the church is more a servant function than a male prerogative.

shooters. Paul wrote those epistles to them in order to outline remedial measures that had to be taken in order to manage the crisis until he would arrive on the scene and take the situation in hand. (For a fuller treatment of this historical background, see Bilezikian, *Community 101* (Zondervan, pp. 82–182).

The exceptional strategy devised by Paul to resolve such problems reversed the standards of community life he advocated in his other writings. According to 1 Timothy, chapters 2 and 3, and Titus, chapter 1, the ministries of teaching, of managing the affairs of the church, and of leadership were to be rigidly consolidated. The mechanism for such control was the appointment of a highly selective core of leaders who were exclusively entrusted with those tasks. Those leaders had to be male, married (“husband of one wife”), and fathers of children who were believers, obedient, and respectful in all things. These requirements were not presented as optional. At that time, they provided indispensable proof of aptitude to serve those churches in their situations of emergency.

The restrictions thus prescribed excluded from ministry and leadership functions in such churches not only the women but also the following categories of men: all single men (despite the New Testament preference for singleness as a favored state for Christian service); all married men with only one child; all married men with children too young to profess faith; all married men with children old enough to profess faith but unconverted; all married men with believing but disobedient children; all married men with believing and obedient children but not respectful in all things. To complicate matters, the text does not specify by what standard or by whom children were to be evaluated in terms of obedience, submissiveness, and respectful behavior.

The indiscriminate application of this restrictive remedial model of the Pastoral Epistles to contemporary church governance structures raises some startling issues. First, it is obvious that the leadership and ministry structures of most churches would be decimated should the family status requirements laid out in the Pastoral Epistles be followed to the letter.

Second, the underlying principle of restricting ministry in sick or immature churches to a few leaders of proven managerial competency remains valid today for churches that find themselves in similarly extreme situations. However, such leadership must now be selected according to criteria other than gender or family status in order to meet the biblical expectations of managerial effectiveness. Third, it must be asked: Why is it that the male leaders of countless churches require the rigorous observance of the restrictions that pertain to female leadership (1 Tim. 2:11–12), while they conveniently gloss over the similarly restrictive provisions that concern men, provisions that are not desirable or optional but mandatory (3:4–5, 12; Titus 1:5–6)? The hypocrisy of such inconsistent practices must be acknowledged and repudiated.

The double standard implicit in this kind of discrimination is lethal to biblical community. Churches that claim or aspire to be mature and healthy must come clean and clear on the side of the normative model, which calls for non-discriminatory structures of ministry participation on the basis of spiritual gifts. The specific exclusions surveyed above belong to remedial measures required by situations of exception for sick or immature churches. They thus confirm the normative practice for healthy and mature churches generally advocated in the New Testament.

This discussion demonstrates the urgency of the challenge for twenty-first century believers to return to the tradition that preceded their various ecclesiastical traditions, and thus to recover from Scripture itself nonhierarchical complementary patterns of community structuring that can serve as models for relations among Christians in both church and family, and as the compelling incentive for a community-deprived world to recognize, in the unblemished witness of the church, the magnificence of God’s plan for universal reconciliation in Jesus Christ. n

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Books Mentioned in This Issue These may be purchased through CBE's Book Service or online Book Store (www.CBEInternational.org)

- *Good News for Women*, by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Baker, 1997)
- *Women Leaders and the Church*, by Linda Belleville (Baker, 2000)
- *Beyond Sex Roles*, by Gilbert Bilezikian (Baker, 1985)
- *Community 101*, by Gilbert Bilezikian (Zondervan, 1997)
- *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, by William Webb (InterVarsity Press, 2001)
- *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal*, by Carroll Osburn (ACU Press, 2001)

Facing a Frozen Chaplaincy

One ordained Southern Baptist woman's dilemma.

RACHEL COGGINS

S NOW COVERED THE GROUND OF THE STILL SLEEPING GERMAN town as I trudged toward the chapel. Stepping swiftly, more from fear than from cold, I arrived safely at my destination: a beautiful, gray stone church built nearly 200 years ago. It was the United States Army's Community Chapel in Aschaffenburg, Germany.

The giant wooden door creaked as I pushed it open, then locked it behind me. Walking through the sanctuary on the way to my office, I stopped to sing a prayer. The acoustics in the stone cathedral-styled church were magnificent, and the sound of the sung praise reverberated from the high ceiling and stone walls. As light began to peep through the stained-glass windows, I felt the presence of God. I felt the pain of mothers weeping for their sons fallen in battle, and I felt the peace that had sustained me through this very trying period.

The following Sunday, military guards carrying M-16 rifles stood on each side of the entrance to the chapel. They checked people as they arrived for worship services that morning. Saddam Hussein had promised to rain terror on Americans in retaliation for air strikes. The threats were effective: We were terrorized.

Called to duty

Two months earlier the United States Army had called me to active duty. I was one of a group of thirty-three army reserve chaplains assigned to support army posts in Germany. Most of the soldiers on these posts, including their chaplains, were on the front lines of Operation Desert Storm (1990–91). Left behind on the installations were the families of those soldiers, who, with few exceptions, were women and children.

Of the thirty-three chaplains, I was the only female, and the only one with a spouse also deployed. My husband, a U.S. Air Force chaplain, was also in the war area. When I said to the women at Aschaffenburg, "I understand," they listened, for they knew I did. I understood the intense loneliness and the gripping fear of being left behind in a foreign country while your spouse goes forward to a battlefield from which he may never return. In ways that my male counterparts could not do, I held the hands of the women who were there and offered God's care. I was not better than the men but I was unique, and this uniqueness was a gift from God.

Chapel attendance tripled during those difficult months, and from the pulpit God enabled me to bring inspired messages of comfort, courage, and challenge. This powerful experience deeply affirmed my call-

ing from God, and my ministry as an army reserve chaplain.

Opportunity denied

Twelve years after this cold February morning in Germany there came a chilling statement from the trustees of the Southern Baptist Chaplain's Commission. That endorsing agent had voted to freeze the opportunity for Southern Baptist women to serve as military chaplains. "We will refrain from endorsing ordained women to the office of chaplain,"¹ the statement read. Since ordination is mandatory for military chaplaincy,² this will prohibit women from entering military chaplaincy through the Southern Baptist Convention. The trustees say they will work with the military and with other organizations that require ordination—suggesting that the organizations will change *their* standards to accommodate the new SBC policy. Whether this will actually work remains to be seen, but this writer, for one, is doubtful.

When I began seminary at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) in 1980, we were beginning to feel the undercurrent of a movement that would drastically change the SBC. The movement was fueled with inflammatory statements implying that people who did not believe or follow the Bible were teaching in and leading our seminaries and convention. The typical Southern Baptist church member was outraged at the thought of heresy afoot. I remember my relatives speaking passionately about this, saying, "We have to get back to the Bible!" Unfortunately, the tragedy that would follow, with the manipulation of these words, could not be seen, and is still not seen from the vantage point of many church members.

Serving with pride

When the doors opened for me to join the army reserves, I asked the Home Mission Board (HMB; today called the North American Mission Board) to endorse me. They did. For years, there remained within the chaplaincy department a strongly supportive team. Whatever was happening at the convention level, the chaplaincy division remained somehow set apart and supportive.

In 1996 my husband, Mike, and I were even chosen to represent military chaplaincy in an HMB video study entitled *Going Where Others Cannot Go*. At that time my husband was chaplain for the United States Air Force Thunderbirds, based at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas. An HMB camera crew came out to film us. They took some great shots



For God and country: Chaplain (Maj.) Rachel Coggins, USAR, with her U.S. Air Force chaplain husband, Mike, and their son, Nathan.

of the planes in flight, then added Mike's passionate remarks about praying for and being with the team.

Then came my story. The theme was centered on a full-time mom who turns Weekend Warrior. I dressed in my skirted green uniform and went off to the hospital where my army reserve unit worked. They filmed me holding a baby and offering prayer and support to the parents. "One day I want to be a chaplain too" was a typical response found in the more than 2,000 letters we received from young people all across America who saw and were inspired by the video. Many of these were young girls who wrote to me and said they wanted to be a chaplain.

That story told in 1996 is similar to the life I have today. I have remained a full-time mom and give support to my husband while working as a reservist two days a month. Yet somehow, even this is too liberal for the new SBC.

Pertinent questions

Must I now say to Southern Baptist girls, "Sorry; you cannot be a chaplain like me"? The Army Chief of Chaplains, Chaplain (Maj. Gen.) Gaylord T. Gunhus, says that mentoring those who would be chaplains is a number-one priority. He has written: "The motivation for mentoring is directly connected to our motivation for ministry—in short: we have a calling to be mentors!"³ I would be going against the directive of the chief if I did not mentor women who will follow me. But how can they follow me if they are denied the opportunity to be a chaplain?

Here are other questions to ask concerning the trustees' statement. *Is there no longer respect for the decisions of the local church?* The process to my ordination was a very long road. All along the way Southern Baptist churches voted to affirm my calling. A Southern Baptist church in Louisiana voted to send me as an HMB missionary; a Mississippi church voted to send me to seminary; a North Carolina church licensed me; and a church in Massachusetts voted to ordain me. When my endorsement needed to be reaffirmed two years ago, leadership in SBC churches in Georgia and North Carolina affirmed my calling and mission. Were these churches wrong?

Is this issue about what the Bible says, or is it tradition? The statement by the trustees says, "The Bible does not clearly set forth a detailed description of the practice of ordination as it is commonly observed today. However, Southern Baptists, following scriptural principles, have developed a rich and meaningful tradition."⁴ It says further that the *tradition* is about "ordaining God-called men into the ministry."⁵

Are they revising history? The statement negates the many *God-called women* that Southern Baptists have already ordained. I should know, I'm one of them. As Sojourner Truth would say, "Ain't I a woman?"⁶

Why can't women be content with "caring" roles? The trustees tried to express support for women by saying, "They are called and gifted to serve in many caring roles."⁷ I know about these caring, volunteer jobs. Most of my min-

istry is in caring, volunteer roles. The army reserves pay me for two days a month; is this asking too much? Chaplaincy has been an oasis for women in professional ministry. Military chaplaincy is one of the few jobs where women and men are paid equally.

The bottom line

George Barna's research tells us that women lead in all aspects of spirituality and are the backbone of the church, making up 60 percent of the membership. While he is optimistic about this, Barna also states that women are paying a high price for carrying the load. He warns: "We may continue to see tens of thousands of women leaving the church unless there is a widespread, aggressive, thoughtful approach to recognizing and appreciating women."⁸

The statement of the NAMB trustees is both a show of nonrecognition (of my ordination, my calling, my ministry) and a lack of appreciation. I thank God for men like Ed Beddingfield of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, who wrote in the North Carolina Baptist *Biblical Recorder*: "We not only accept women who are ordained; we welcome them gladly, celebrating their calling, their commitment and their contribution to the ministry of Christ."⁹

Pro Deo et Patria: For God and Country.

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Notes

1. "NAMB Will No Longer Endorse Ordained Female Chaplains," Baptist Press <<http://www.bpnews.net/query/Date.asp>> (Feb. 8, 2002).
2. For a list of requirements for U.S. Army chaplains, see the U.S. Army chaplain Web site: <<http://www.usarmy-chaplain.com/require.htm>>.
3. Chief of Chaplains newsletter (March 2, 2002): "To All Members of the Unit Ministry Team."
4. Baptist Press (Feb. 8, 2002).
5. Ibid.
6. Sojourner Truth was a slave and an evangelist. Her "Ain't I a Woman?" speech can be viewed at <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.html>>.
7. Baptist Press (Feb. 8, 2002).
8. "Women Are the Backbone of the Christian Congregations in America," <<http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=47&Reference=DStudy>>.
9. "CBF 'Gladly' Welcomes Ordained Women," *Biblical Recorder*, Vol. 168, no. 10 (March 30, 2002); p. 3. The author, Ed Beddingfield, is chair of the CBF Council on Endorsement.

News Note: The Associated Press reported on June 12 that two delegates to the SBC gathering in St. Louis made motions to "rescind an order for missionaries to affirm in writing the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message." That statement, amended in 2000, prohibits women from serving as pastors and directs wives to "submit graciously to their husbands." The AP said, "The convention voted to refer the missionary motions to the SBC's missions boards."

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A WORD OF SPECIAL THANKS

We are greatly indebted to CBE member Alvera Mickelsen for the fifth PRISCILLA PAPERS Index, which you will find is a special pull-out section in this issue.

Alvera Mickelsen, retired professor of journalism at Wheaton and Bethel colleges, is the author or editor for several books, and is a cofounder of Christians for Biblical Equality.

We are most grateful to Alvera for the generous gift of her time and expertise in developing this Index of PRISCILLA PAPERS for Volumes 13 and 14. We are certain that this index will be most helpful to our readers.

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What Jesus Thought About Women

His regard for them was unusual for his time—even scandalous.

DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS

WORLD RELIGIONS HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH NOT ONLY permitting, but also with perpetuating ingrained patterns of sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny. These religions, it seems, must either change or be left behind by all who believe that women and men are equal in their rights, abilities, and potential. Some charge that Christianity demeans and marginalizes women, that it is a male religion in which men are given the preponderance of power, prestige, and influence. But what did the founder of Christianity teach about women?

Jesus and women's dignity

In the ancient context of Jesus' day, women typically had little social or cultural influence. Their roles were usually limited to domestic life, and in the home and family they had very little control over money or possessions apart from their fathers or husbands. A Jewish man would pray three benedictions each day, one of which thanked God for not making him a woman—although nothing like this is contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. Though written within and for patriarchal cultures, the Hebrew Scriptures present several women as leaders worthy of respect, especially Deborah, who was a prophet and judge over Israel (Judges 4–5). Other women, such as Miriam, Huldah, and Esther, play important roles as well. While some women in ancient Judaism enjoyed some opportunities for leadership and respect, this was more the exception than the rule.¹ Within this cultural context, Jesus' respectful regard for women was unusual and sometimes even scandalous to those around him.

Although the New Testament is often assailed for being sexist and patriarchal, it fares far better than other ancient documents. Consider Gnosticism. Elaine Pagels champions the Gnostics as proto-feminists who had a higher regard for women than did writers of the New Testament.² This conclusion is quite speculative and probably based on spotty evidence and selective quotation.³ The last saying of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas expresses contempt for women:

Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."⁴

Spiritual gender switching is not required for the sake of Jesus' kingdom. Philip Jenkins's comment is apt: "Though women play so crucial a role in Gnostic texts, the religious system as a whole had nothing good to say of women."⁵

Women were held in low esteem because of their close

connection with physical procreation, which the dualistic Gnostics detested. Men of Jesus' day typically viewed women's seductive behavior as responsible for most (if not all) sexual sin.⁶ Jesus never did so. While he never condoned immodesty, Jesus judged sexual lust as a man's individual responsibility: "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Further, Jesus tightened the restrictions on divorce, not permitting men to divorce their wives for frivolous reasons (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:1–12), which, in a patriarchal setting, would leave women vulnerable and outcast. While the consensus was that only women could commit adultery against their husbands, Jesus insisted that a husband could commit adultery against his wife; it was a sin for both sexes.

Jesus insisted that adultery was a sin for both sexes.

Jesus startled his hearers by proclaiming to the religious establishment that reformed prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before they.

I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John [the Baptist] came to

you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. (Matt. 21:31–32*)

Jesus identified the two most despised kinds of people and claimed that their repentance and faith would make them heirs of God's kingdom. On several occasions, prostitutes, the most scorned of women, received Jesus' commendation—not for their way of living, but because of their response to God's message through Jesus. They found hope in this remarkable man.

A woman who was called "a sinner" (someone guilty of a serious and scandalous sexual sin) anointed and kissed Jesus' feet while weeping. This occurred in the home of Simon, a Pharisee. Jesus accepted her actions as demonstrating her gratitude and love, and he announced that her many sins had been forgiven. "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50).

Jesus showed compassion for women by healing them of various illnesses. He evidenced his willingness to disregard social and religious customs by not objecting to being touched by a woman who pressed through a crowd to reach out to him. Jesus healed her of a twelve-year flow of blood (Matt. 9:18), a malady that would have made her ritually "unclean," and thus untouchable according to levitical law. After healing another woman, who had been crippled for eighteen years, Jesus referred to her as "a daughter

* All Scripture quotations are taken from the NIV.

of Abraham." This showed respect and commendation, because Abraham was the father of the Jewish faith. "Son of Abraham" was common, "daughter of Abraham" was not; but Jesus affirmed her claim to Abraham's religious heritage. Jesus also healed various other women, including Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–17) and the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:40–56).

Jesus referred to women as worthy examples in many of his teachings. When he watched people deposit their gifts into the temple treasury, he saw the wealthy contribute large amounts, but he was most impressed by a poor widow. "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others" (Mark 12:41–44). In Luke chapter 15, Jesus tells three parables about God's rejoicing over repentance. There is the good shepherd who finds the lost sheep and the father who receives back his prodigal son. He also says this:

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:8–10)

In another parable, Jesus lauds the persistence of the widow who implores an unjust judge for justice in her cause (Luke 18:1–8). Millard Erickson notes that "in all these instances, Jesus tacitly shows that a woman can represent the activity of God or a righteous individual equally well as can a man."⁷

Jesus shows no gender favoritism in his examples of praiseworthy behavior. Other parables speak of foolish women and men as well (Matt. 24:40–41; Luke 17:34–35). Although Jesus tells his disciples to pray to "Our Father" (Matt. 6:9), the teachings discussed above—along with other teachings in the Scriptures—show that he is speaking of God metaphorically, not of a gendered male being.⁸

While decrying the spiritual obliviousness of one of his audiences, Jesus said that at the final judgment two witnesses would be brought forth against them: those who repented at the preaching of Jonah, and an ancient Gentile woman. "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). This reference to the Queen of Sheba was remarkable because at that time rabbis did not typically accept the legal testimony of a woman. Yet Jesus predicted that her word—against that of the male religious authorities—would be determinative in the final scheme of things. Jesus, the "one greater than Solomon," sides with her against the male religious elite. This was unheard of in his day.

Jesus did not annul family relationships, but he refused to endorse the common idea that women exist solely to be mothers and wives in the home. After Jesus gave a lesson about evil spirits, a woman from the crowd called out,

"Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:27–28). Instead of reinforcing the idea that motherhood is the primary or overriding purpose of women, Jesus put more value on being attentive and obedient to God's word. This is an implicit endorsement of the right of women to be taught, which was not usually permitted in Jewish circles.

Women and theological instruction

Jesus' affirmation of women as students of religious instruction is made more clear in the account of the sisters Mary and Martha, close associates of Jesus. After inviting Jesus and his disciples into their home, Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching. Martha was distracted by all her chores of hospitality and said to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38–42). Jesus does more than tell Martha not to be so hyperactive. He endorses Mary's right to be taught, remarking that this is more important than the traditional province of a woman (preoccupation with domestic tasks).

In the account of the death of Martha's brother, Lazarus, the same woman that Jesus had corrected for not listening to his teaching now affirms a vivid theological doctrine about him. In a discussion with Jesus about life, death, and resurrection, Martha makes a declaration very similar to the one given by the apostle Peter (Matt. 16:16). She says, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). She thus gives one of the strongest statements of messianic faith in the Gospels, and so becomes a model of theological veracity concerning Jesus.

Jesus' willingness to interact without condescension with women, even the outcasts, is obvious in his encounter and long dialogue with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Sychar (John 4:5–42). Fatigued from the journey, Jesus asks a woman, who had come to draw water, if she would give him a drink. The woman was stunned since she recognized him as a Jew, and Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans. The Jews held that Samaritans were "unclean," and that a Jew would become unclean by touching a vessel handled by a Samaritan. Jesus uses the opportunity to discuss his mission. "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman is puzzled by this, and she wonders how Jesus could provide this since he has nothing with which to draw the water. Jesus responds, "All who drink this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman requests this water of Jesus, but Jesus says that she should call her husband and then come back. She

Jesus referred to women as worthy examples in many of his teachings.

replies that she has no husband. Jesus says that she has had five husbands and that the man she now has is not her husband. The woman, who must have been startled by the knowledge displayed by this Jewish stranger, declares that he is a prophet. She then says, "Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." To this Jesus offers a theological explanation and a prophecy.

Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:21–24)

The woman returns the theological volley and confesses: "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus then declares, "I who speak to you am he." This is the only time in the Gospels, prior to his trial and crucifixion (Matt. 26:62–65), when Jesus directly claims to be the Messiah. He says it during a theological conversation with a Samaritan woman. It is no wonder that John tells us that when "his disciples returned [they] were surprised to find him talking with a woman."

The woman then went to her town and proclaimed, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" At her urging, many Samaritans came to Jesus. They convinced him to stay with them for two days, during which they heard his teachings. Many became believers. A social outcast of the oppressed gender was authorized by Jesus to tell others about him. He did not require a man to do it. Jesus' theological discussions with women were remarkable because Jewish males would not discuss such things with women. Jesus, however, deemed both women and men worthy and qualified to converse on God's ways with the human race.

Why no women among the Twelve?

Despite these accounts of Jesus' teachings and actions regarding women, some still protest that he was not truly affirming and welcoming of women because he did not select any women to be apostles. Therefore, he did not see them as worthy of religious leadership. Several considerations mitigate this charge that he excluded women because he had a low view of them.

First, males dominated and outranked females in Jesus' day to a degree we can barely imagine. Society was hierarchical in the spheres of state, religion, and the household. In the face of this, Jesus frequently underscored the virtue of humble service.

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.

But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:25–27)

Such a radical pattern of humility and service would not allow for male exploitation of women. Jesus' denunciation of those who preyed on defenseless widows was consistent with this countercultural stance (Mark 12:38–40).

Second, the Gospels report that women were among his close followers. Martha and Mary have already been mentioned. A group of women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and others—listened to Jesus and traveled with Jesus and his male disciples. "These women were helping to support them out of their own means" (Luke 8:1–3). The faithfulness of Jesus' female disciples was most notable during the last days of his ministry. Unlike most of the male disciples, the women who followed Jesus were at the crucifixion (Matt. 27:55–56). Jesus' burial was witnessed by at least two women, Mary Magdalene and "the other

Mary" (Matt. 27:61). All four Gospels report that women—including Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary," and Salome—were the first to discover the empty tomb and to proclaim Jesus' resurrection to the initially unbelieving male disciples.⁹

Third, given the highly patriarchal setting of Jesus' ministry, it would have been unlikely if not culturally impossible for him to have ministered effectively with women in his innermost circle. As David Scholer notes: "It is remarkable and significant enough that women, at least eight of whom

are known by name and often with as much or more data as some of the Twelve, were included as disciples and proclaimers during Jesus' ministry."¹⁰

Scholer also observes that the original Jewish apostles did not continue to serve as the models for church leadership after the earliest days of the church at Jerusalem. Faithful Gentiles could be leaders as well. Moreover, despite a few local restrictions on women in some settings, there is evidence of women serving in leadership during the New Testament period.¹¹

In light of Jesus' words and deeds, novelist and philosopher Dorothy L. Sayers's comments deserve full quotation.

Perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made jokes about them, never treated them either as "the women, God help us!" or "The Ladies, God bless them!"; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the Gospel that borrows its

pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything “funny” about woman’s nature.¹² n



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Notes

1. David Scholer, “Women” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 880–81.

2. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 48–69.

3. See Kathleen McVey, “Gnosticism, Feminism and Elaine Pagels,” *Theology Today*, January 1981, 498–501.

4. Gospel of Thomas, saying 114.

5. Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 211.

6. Scholer, 880.

7. Millard Erickson, *The Word Made Flesh: An Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 582.

8. See Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), chapter 4.

9. Matthew 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:1–10.

10. Scholer, 886.

11. See Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 39–69, and R. M. Groothuis, chapters 5–10.

12. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 47.

The Subordination Challenge: #4

Proponents of female subordination are asked to prove their case from the Bible.

GILBERT BILEZIKIAN

Challenge #4

Cite a text from the Bible that makes men head over women, or a husband head over his wife.

THE CHALLENGE ABOVE IS THE FOURTH OF TEN BEING PRESENTED here to prompt Christians to grapple with biblical facts rather than accept unquestioningly some traditional assumptions about female roles and, by so doing, blindly follow institutionalized misreadings of Scripture.

The facts

There is no such statement in the Bible that makes men head over women, or a husband head over his wife.

The text in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is often cited as establishing a top-down hierarchy: God over Christ—Christ over man—man over woman.

However, this biblical text must be radically dismembered and its components reshuffled in order to produce such results. The untouched biblical sequence is totally different, and it does not present a hierarchical structure: Christ, head of man—man, head of woman—God, head of Christ.

The teaching in this text concerns the concept of *head* as giver of life. In Creation, Christ (as the Word, John 1:3) gave life to man; man to woman (as she was taken from him, Gen. 2:21–23); and in the Incarnation, God gave life to Christ (Luke 1:35). This understanding of “head” as “provider of life” is consistent with the immediate context, which deals with the significance of origination (1 Cor. 11:7–12).

The meaning of *head* as servant-provider of life in this

text is also consistent with the headship passage in Ephesians 5:21–33. There, the church is described as being subject to Christ in the reciprocity of servanthood because Christ as head is also servant to the church as its Savior and as the source of its welfare. Saviorhood in the New Testament is not a lordship role but one of self-sacrifice in radical servanthood.

Likewise, the wife is servant to her husband as she submits to him, because the husband is servant to her in radical headship as he gives himself up for her as Christ did for the church (vv. 25–30).

Both the general concept of headship in the New Testament and this passage of Scripture are infused with the notions of mutual submission (v. 21) and, therefore, of reciprocal servanthood. Such biblical teachings reduce the imposition of hierarchical relations between husbands and wives to irrelevance, if not to abuse, in their relationship. n

Gilbert Bilezikian is professor emeritus of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College (IL) and cofounder of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL. Among the books of which he is the author are *Beyond Sex Roles and Community 101* (see his article on community beginning on p. 3 of this issue).



Written responses to this and the other nine challenges will be evaluated by a panel of three professors emeriti of the Department of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College. Send responses to *Christians for Biblical Equality* (122 West Franklin Ave., Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451; e-mail: CBE@cbeinternational.org).

For a fuller treatment of the themes presented in these challenges, consult the CBE catalog for many available resources.

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What Is Biblical Equality?

A simple definition needs further discussion, not least because of misunderstanding.

ALAN G. PADGETT

Just what does Christians for Biblical Equality understand to be the scriptural teaching about the equality of humankind? Wishing to make available a more complete statement than that already available in CBE's published materials on basic beliefs and values (see, for example, p. 23), Prof. Alan Padgett here provides a fuller description of these beliefs and understandings. In this article he reviews CBE's beliefs and gives a comprehensive explanation of them. This article is also being made available in a brochure that can be passed along to others, as well as accessed at www.cbeinternational.org.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL EQUALITY? IT IS THE BELIEF THAT ALL people are equal before God and in Christ. All have equal responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to the glory of God. God freely calls believers to roles and ministries without regard to class, gender, or race. We believe this because the Bible and Jesus Christ teach it to us. That is biblical equality.

This simple statement needs further discussion, in no small part because of misunderstanding. Many people misunderstand the teaching of the Bible regarding issues of gender, race, and class. Others misunderstand the definition of equality and what that means for the way we live our lives. In this short essay, we hope to clarify the meaning of biblical equality in some degree, and we invite you to read and reflect further on this important topic.

The principle of biblical equality can be developed as three ideas:

1. *Human equality.* All people are equal before God, and are equal in church, home, and society.

2. *Equal responsibility.* Race, gender, and class are not barriers to Christ. Membership, ministry, and mission are open to all in his kingdom, based upon our personal vocation, moral and personal qualifications, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3. *Mutual submission.* Christian love is the heart of life in the Spirit. Mutual submission is Christian love in action, treating each person with dignity.

Let us consider more fully each of these important biblical truths.

The Bible is the inspired Word, the revelation of God to the prophets and apostles within human history and human language. As such, the Bible is the highest written authority for faith and practice in the Christian church. Of course, the Bible is only important to us because we love and believe in God. He has given us this book to help us better know, love, and serve the One who has created us, and who has saved us from our sins. Biblical equality is committed to biblical authority.

Many women and men have long struggled for justice, equality, and peace in this world. We value their efforts, but we cannot always agree with their philosophies. As Christian believers, we must submit our thoughts to Christ as we seek to know the wisdom of God. After serious and sustained study, we believe the Bible does teach human equality, but it does so in its own terms.

Equally made in God's image

Human equality. All human beings are created alike in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–28). All of us are made “a little lower than the angels” (Psalm 8), and have equal dignity as children of our Father in heaven. For this reason every human being deserves our respect and is the object of the love of God. The teachings of Jesus make this clear. The greatest commandment is to love and worship God, but the second greatest is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). The neighbor can be anyone—whomever God brings into my life. The ethic of Jesus even insists that we love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us. Why? Because our Father in heaven makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:43–48). All people are equal before him.

Equality in this sense—moral, spiritual, and political equality—does not mean all people are the same. This is a common mistake. Jesus notices the difference between good and evil, between just and unjust people. There are Jews and Gentiles, women and men, parents and children, and they are not all the same. But they are all equally made in the image of God, and Jesus reaches out to them all.

There are no barriers to the gospel of Christ, nor to the love of God. Jesus ministered to all people, and he accepted as his disciples many women and men who were at the margins of his society, those who were overlooked or oppressed by others. Poor people, tax collectors, prostitutes, even Gentiles were welcomed by Christ into his fellowship. Jesus accepted women disciples as no other rabbi did in his time. He criticized the wealthy and powerful, but the humble and poor he welcomed in the name of his Father.

The church has not always understood true biblical equality, nor acted upon it. Christian leaders have tolerated slavery and racism; they have welcomed the wealthy and powerful while neglecting the poor. They have taught the inferiority of women and promoted sexism in the name of God. These are terrible sins, which are not yet fully overcome. We pray that the Lord of the church will cleanse these sins from his Body, and teach each of us the truth by

***Biblical equality
is committed to
biblical authority.***

his Spirit. All of us are one in Christ, whether Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free (Gal. 3:28).

Some Christians have made the mistake of teaching racism, and they have defended slavery by appeal to the Bible. For example, the curse on Ham (son of Noah, Gen. 9:22–27) was applied to all blacks and Semites (Arabs and Jews), arguing that their races were inferior to Europeans. This interpretation of Genesis is completely false, and it is rightly rejected by church leaders and Bible scholars today. The Bible does not support racism.

Some Christians have made the mistake of teaching a false gospel of wealth or class privilege. They have defended political injustice, corrupt rulers, greed, or consumerism by appeal to the Bible. For example, some see the prayer of Jabez (1 Chron. 4:9–10) as teaching that Christians can and should pray for greater wealth and material goods, and that God wants to make us all rich. This interpretation is completely false, and rightly rejected by church leaders and Bible scholars. The Bible stands against greed, the love of money, and class prejudice. The prophets and Jesus alike condemn those who oppress the poor, the orphan, and the widow. The Bible does not support a false gospel of wealth and class.

In both of the above cases it is important to see particular Bible passages in their context. The context of a passage includes the book it is in, the social and historical background to the text, and the place of that passage in the whole of the Scriptures. When seeking the wisdom of God, we must seek to understand the whole of scriptural teachings on this or any topic. Passages taken in isolation can often be misunderstood. The church should read the whole Bible together, with Christ at its center.

The points that we have made about biblical equality in the areas of race and class are widely accepted today. But such is not the case with issues of gender equality. Some Christians still teach that women are created inferior to men. We deny this, and affirm that God created all people equal. The narratives in Genesis have often been understood to teach the inferiority of women, but a careful reading of them teaches something different.

Man and woman are alike created in the image of God and are given equal responsibility for the stewardship of the animals and plants, and for creating new life (Gen. 1:26–30). The word *man* can mean *human being* in Hebrew, as in this sentence: “So God created humankind [*adam*] in his image, in the image of God he created him [human-kind], male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). True, in the next chapter, Eve is created after Adam and made from his side. But this was because the male alone is “not good”: the first not-good thing in the story! Adam learns that he needs Eve to be fulfilled, and he rejoices in her creation. For this reason, the man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife (Gen. 2:24). Note that the man needs the woman: Does that make her inferior? Together they become “one flesh,” and together they are in the image of God, and create new life through love and unity. Does this

sound like inferiority? Yes, the woman is made as a “helper” who is to be the man’s partner (2:18). But this Hebrew word *helper* is used only of help from an equal or superior, as in “God is my helper.” It does not imply inferiority, as English translations sometimes do. The domination of women by men is a result of sin and the work of the snake, according to Genesis (3:16). It was not so in the beginning, in paradise, where they were one. Taken as a whole, the Bible does not teach the inferiority of women.

Husband and wife alike are equally responsible to Christ

Equal responsibility. As adult human beings, women and men have equal responsibility in the home, the church, and the larger society. The ministry and service a believer takes up is not restricted by race, gender, or by social status. The basis for this is soundly biblical. First of all, every Christian is already a priest, part of a holy people. Christ is our High Priest, and all who are members of his Body are living stones in the temple of the Holy Spirit, and priests in the new people of God (1 Peter 2:5–9). Second, every believer has a particular ministry in the body of Christ, and in the mission of the church. Our particular ministry is based upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and upon the calling of God. Worldly categories such as class, race, or gender are no barrier to the call of God and the gifts of the Spirit. For these reasons, the ordained minister (or priest) is no different from any other believer. Rather, her or his vocation is to be a servant and to work within the church itself in the office of pastor. The Bible does not restrict women from service as ordained ministers, nor teach that their ministry is legitimate only in submission to a male authority figure.

Husband and wife alike are equally responsible to Christ, the true center of the Christian home. True, Paul does tell wives to submit to their husbands and says that men are the “head” of women. But these statements must be read in context, and interpreted in their own times. In the longest section on men and women in his letters, Ephesians 5:21–33, Paul begins with the duty of all Christians to submit to one another in the fear of Christ (v. 21). Those who focus only on what Paul has to say to women and slaves often misunderstand this point. The passage as a whole begins with mutual submission.

What is mutual submission? It is nothing less than love in action. I see the need in my sister or brother and meet it from my own strength and gifting from God. Most of what Paul has to say in this passage is written to the husband, who must love his wife and give of his own life and power, just as Christ sacrificed himself for the church. The word *head* in Paul, when not pointing to a literal head, means the one who is “first” in some way, not some kind of authority or power figure. This point is often misunderstood. We must allow Paul to use the word in a variety of ways.

In this passage it means being first in loving service. “The husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the

Man and woman are alike created in the image of God and given equal responsibility.

head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior" (v. 23, NRSV). Paul extends this teaching later (vv. 28–32) in the heart of this passage. Overall, he insists that husband as "head" cares for and loves the wife as his own "body." *Head* in this chapter does not mean the man dominates and rules over the woman. True, wives are taught to "submit in everything to their husbands" just as the church does to Christ (v. 24). But this is in the context of mutual submission of all to Christ (v. 21). The force of the passage as a whole is calling husbands to self-giving sacrifice for their wives; that is, it is calling husbands likewise to submit to their wives (without saying it in this exact way).

We sometimes hear teaching in the churches today that the man is the "priest of the home," or that women need the "spiritual covering" of a husband in order to be fulfilled. There simply is no biblical basis for this teaching. Women and men are both priests in Christ, as has already been stated. Men are not spiritually superior to women in the Bible. This is simply another form of traditional male domination of women—common to Western civilization for thousands of years—being read into the Bible by traditional, conservative Christian leaders. It is time the church told the truth to women about such lies.

There are two passages in Paul's letters, out of the whole of the Bible, that are cited by those seeking to perpetuate the rule of men over women in the church. They ignore or dismiss all of the passages where Paul teaches the equality of women and men (such as Gal. 3:28, 1 Cor. 11:11–12, 1 Cor. 7:3–4, and the women leaders he commends in Rom. 16:1–7). Instead, they focus on the verses in which he calls women to silence and submission in the church.

What about those passages? While we cannot in this short essay fully deal with these passages, the general rule of careful reading, research, and attention to context will bring clarity to these two passages. The verses in question are 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12. For different reasons, Paul tells particular women in that time and place to submit and be silent.

In Corinth, he tells three disruptive groups to be silent, and to obey the order and structure of the Christian worship service. Those who would speak in tongues must do so in order, not all at once, and only if there is an interpreter; otherwise, they must be silent (14:27–28). Those who prophesy must also do so in order and not disrupt the service; otherwise, they must be silent (v. 30). Finally, women who interrupt the service by talking to their husbands should be silent (v. 34). Women are told to submit, not to men (as some think), but to order and decency in the worship service. This is hardly a universal command for all women all the time!

The passage in 1 Timothy 2 is the memory verse for those who seek to limit women's ministry in the church. At first glance, 1 Timothy 2:8–15 might seem like a universal principle, grounded in the creation story of Adam and Eve, for women never to have teaching authority over men.

This is not the view of a growing number of Bible scholars today. Like all of the Letters of Paul, this passage is written to a particular church, in its own special situation. These verses are written to a particular group of wealthy women, who were causing dissension and anger among the men by their false teaching (vv. 8–10). Like Eve, these women had been deceived by the "snake" (false teachers) and had therefore fallen into sin (v. 14). The emphasis is upon silence for these women—not for all women all of the time—while they submit to sound teaching. They are called to learn sound theology in silence and full submission (v. 11).

The submission in this verse is not to men, as is commonly thought, but to sound doctrine. Implied here is submission to the teachings of Paul and Timothy rather than to the false teachers who were leading the women astray (2 Tim. 3:6). Understood in its own time and context, and read with Christ at the center of the whole of the Bible, Scripture does not limit the leadership of women in the church. Women and men of all races and classes are equally responsible to the call of God on their lives in society, home, and the fellowship of believers.

The Christian ethic of love, within human institutions

The ethics of the Christian life is love. Mutual submission is love in action.

Mutual submission. The ethics of the Christian life is love. Mutual submission is love in action, within human institutions. Jesus clearly teaches the ethics of self-giving and spiritual love as the true goal of Christian life. According to him, the two greatest commandments are to love God with all we are and have, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In his ministry on earth, Jesus lived the ethics of love, and therefore of mutual submission, to the full. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In this very chapter Jesus lays down before his apostles the basic principle of mutual submission: "You know that among the nations those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you: whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the servant of all" (vv. 42–44). Jesus followed the way of love, the way of service, and of care for others in need, even submitting himself unto death for "the ransom of many." The Christian way of love is also the way of the cross.

Mutual submission is the Christian ethic of love within human institutions. Mutual submission means caring for my neighbors, meeting their needs from my strengths and gifts. All of us live within certain human institutions and organizations, which make up our society and commonwealth. Examples would be our family, schools, work, government, and local churches. Within the social structures of this age, Christians freely and equally participate in the roles and ministries that God has called us to.

There is no limit to what God can do with a humble and

contrite servant, no barriers from gender, class, physical handicap, or ethnic background. All freely participate as joint and equal heirs of our King and Savior. This means the believer lives out an ethic of love in cooperation with other members of the group, Christian and non-Christian. The ethic of love is not an open door for foolishness or naiveté. Mutual submission means entering into the group with a servant's heart, but also with a wise head that knows sin corrupts every person and human organization.

The Christian ethic of love serves our family members, neighbors, and fellow citizens in a wise and intelligent manner, meeting their real needs as God allows us to understand them. This also means understanding one's own strengths and gifts, for only from strength can we serve others. It is God's Spirit, of course, that gives us the strength, hope, and gifts for service and mission. We do not, and cannot, serve the world for Christ in our own strength.

Some Christians are even now teaching that women must always take subordinate roles in the family and in the church, saying men must be the final authority figures. This teaching is completely out of line with the model and teachings of Jesus. The ethic of mutual submission and love that Jesus teaches is utterly contrary to all "lording it over"

in the name of masculine superiority. It is also the end of the privilege of class, wealth, and racial background. Worldly priorities like these come from human sin and the lies of Satan, not from God's Word.

True biblical equality

We have set forth in brief compass the Christian teaching concerning biblical equality. Biblical equality is rooted and grounded in our Savior, Christ the Lord, and in his book. We have seen that biblical equality means human equality of all in the image of God; equal responsibility for all believers without regard to wealth, class, gender, or race; and mutual submission to one another in the name of Christ. May our beautiful Savior, in the power of the Spirit, instruct us all in the truth of the gospel and lead us all in ministry, as it may please him, to the glory of God the Father. n



Alan Padgett is professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. He is the author of *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Wipf & Stock, 2000) and editor of *Reason and the Christian Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1994). He is a consulting theologian for PRISCILLA PAPERS.



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Culture of Analysis



William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* is a hermeneutical tour de force. Webb severs ties with traditional hermeneutical textbooks by offering intrascriptural and extrascriptural criteria and a case study approach (akin to W. M. Swartley's *Slavery, Sabbath, War & Women*) rather than a step-by-step methodology. Webb

tackles these issues collectively (i.e., there is no specific chapter on homosexual hermeneutical issues), modeling that interpretative issues need to be grappled with corporately (read here biblically—both testaments) rather than individually, as isolated pericopes. Exhaustive word analyses rarely win hermeneutical arguments (think of all the ink spilled on the Greek word *headship*); rather, it is reading texts holistically (*vis-à-vis* “cultural analysis”) that determines interpretation.

Webb's holistic approach is a redemptive-movement hermeneutic that is the engagement of “the redemptive spirit of the text in a way that moves the contemporary appropriation of the text beyond its original-application framing” (p. 30). A key component of a redemptive movement is the idea of movement. Thus, Webb sketches this movement as an “XYZ model,” beginning with the Original Culture (X) → Bible (Y) → Our Culture → Ultimate

**Slaves, Women & Homosexuals:
Exploring the Hermeneutics
of Cultural Analysis**
by William J. Webb
IVP, 2001, 320 pp.; \$24.99 (paper)

Ethic (Z). Webb then appropriates eighteen criteria, ranging from seed ideas (persuasive criterion) to contextual comparisons (inconclusive criterion) to evaluate interpretive issues indicated in the title of his book.

Webb's most stimulating chapter is his final one: “What If I Am Wrong?” where he develops his default position, or, in other words, plays “devil's advocate.” I appreciate his disposition here. Often hermeneutical textbooks suffer from foreclosure, rather than foresight, when involved knotty interpretative issues are involved. This is not to say Webb is hermeneutically ambiguous and adrift: he makes decisions based on his criteria. But he is also aware of the complexity of the cultural issues. He maintains a “complementary egalitarian” position on women, yet notes that “ultra-soft patriarchy” is a “significant possibility” (p. 250). This kind of dialogue (and courage) is needed by more biblical scholars.

Webb's book should be read, discussed, and digested by everyone who is interested in understanding what Krister Stendahl once remarked forty years ago as the descriptive task of biblical theology: the process of moving from “what it [the text] meant” to “what it means.” This is a critical journey to embark upon as Christians, especially in a culture that diminishes the authority of the Bible. Webb is an outstanding tour guide. Let the journey begin! n
Reviewed by Joseph B. Modica, chaplain and assistant professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University, St. Davids, PA.

Q Q Q

Ideal Women



Carroll Osburn's second edition of *Women in the Church* is a welcome contribution to the ongoing conversation on this topic, and he has reworked the book to take advantage of new developments and research. It feels like a textbook, but nonstudents will still glean valuable insights.

Women in the Church is divided into two halves. The first half gives historical context to positions taken by various participants in the discussion on women's roles. Osburn categorizes these participants in four groups. On a spectrum from right to left, they are hierarchicalists, hierarchical complementarians, evangelical feminists, and radical feminists (Osburn's terms).

Osburn discards as gently as possible both radical ends of the spectrum, wishing to address moderate participants—radicalists from either end are likely to disagree vehemently with the author anyway. Instead, he encourages moderates on both sides of the debate to admit the things they have in common (such as a high view of Scripture) but also be willing to admit when cherished interpretations of certain Scriptures may not be accurate.

**Women in the Church:
Reclaiming the Ideal**
by Carroll Osburn
ACU Press, 2001, 280 pp.; \$17.95 (paper)

This goal informs the second half of the book, which examines key Scripture passages in detail and explains how each camp handles the passage. Osburn strives to be completely objective in these discussions and, compared to other authors, has probably done the best job of attaining this goal. Readers should be aware that he sometimes disagrees with popular viewpoints held by both sides, including some commonly held by CBE authors.

Osburn keeps his disagreements civil, though readers not used to academic debates may find his critiques a bit harsh. In fact, in many places the book feels as much like Osburn's response to his fellow academics and authors as addressed to a “lay” audience.

Still, the book is a thorough study of the Scriptures on which the debates about women's roles hinge. One could easily select a chapter about an important passage and discuss it with a complementarian (or maybe even a hierarchicalist).

Women in the Church has value in that it is so scholarly sound and because it demonstrates to critics that egalitarians are committed to a high view of Scripture. I will return to this text often. I may even bring myself to share a chapter or two with traditional friends and family members. n
Reviewed by Cheryl L. Kester, director of grants and foundation relations at John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR.

CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY

Christians for Biblical Equality is an organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and woman of all racial and ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teaching of Galatians 3:28: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Core Values

We believe . . .

- The Bible teaches the equality of women and men.
- God has given each person gifts to be used for the good of Christ's kingdom.
- Christians are to develop and exercise their God-given gifts in home, church, and society.

Mission Statement

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

Core Purpose

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

Envisioned Future

CBE envisions a future where all believers will exercise their gifts for God's glory, with the full support of the Christian Community.

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 in 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 races, 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 the patterns God designed for us.

CBE membership is available to those who support CBE's Statement of Faith. Members receive quarterly issues of CBE's newsmagazine, *MUTUALITY*, and CBE's educational journal, *PRISCILLA PAPERS*. Members are eligible for discounts on items from CBE's Book Service, including books, articles, tapes, and videos. Members are also offered discounts on all international CBE conferences.

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See page 21 for complete information