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Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos more perfectly in the way of the Lord. (Acts 18:26)

Editorial

My earliest years of reading were spent on European children's classics. In retrospect, I find the fathers in these stories to be vexed figures. There's the impoverished father. In *Rumpelstiltskin*, the miller lies his way to marrying his daughter off to a king. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the father (twice!) abandons his children in the woods. Then there's the widower father. All he does is lose one wife and marry another, who promptly turns into the wicked stepmother—*Cinderella* and *Snow White*, for example. Whether impoverished or widower, the father makes choices that are in his own interest. The children survive the choices only because these are fairy tales.

As for husbands, they come in two models. There's the handsome prince who rescues the girl and provides her a happily-ever-after—*Rapunzel* and *Sleeping Beauty*, for example. At the other end, there's *Bluebeard*, who serially kills off his wives. Both models of husband are unreal, and serve for entertainment rather than instruction.

At the same time growing up, I was reading Bible stories. In retrospect, I find the fathers and husbands in them largely inadequate as well. Sarah's husband (twice!) puts her at high risk to keep himself safe. Leah's father tricks Jacob into marrying her, for which Leah pays by going unloved for the rest of her life. When princess Tamar is sexually assaulted her father decides to protect the perpetrator, the crown prince.

Because the biblical narrator doesn't always explicitly call out the offence of the father or husband, the reader—especially if they hold patriarchal values—normalizes these offences just as much as the first audience of fairy tales normalized the behaviour of the male protagonists. This issue is dedicated to helping us review the desired profile of Christian fathers and husbands.

Daniel Gonzalez sets the context, literally, for the discussion on biblical prescriptions for husbands and fathers. Taking 1 Timothy as a test text, he provides a series of examples of texts that we do not apply literally because it would not make sense to. Each

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biblical passage should be carefully understood against its cultural context if we are to rightly apply it to the present day.

Joseph Early sets further context to how the Christian community understands the place of husbands and fathers—first, theologically, and second, socially—by reviewing the thought and work of the influential medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas on the subject of women and men.

Abeneazar Urga carefully unpacks 1 Peter 3:7 to help us understand better the caution it gives to husbands who fail to treat their wives with the honour due to them—such a man's prayers will not receive God's attention! Jeff Miller brings us a sermon on the broader passage (1 Peter 2:18–3:7) to help us fit the difficult advice Peter gives to slaves and wives to submit to masters and husbands into a big picture of our calling to work for the good of others.

Andrew Spurgeon examines the practice of hospitality, which in many cultures is allocated to the women of the family. Through a series of biblical examples, he shows how, when the male head of a household takes the lead in being hospitable, he reflects our welcoming God.

Finally, Joshua George does a big-picture exploration of the terms “complementary” and “egalitarian” to argue that this word pair is a mismatch since it conflates structure and function. A debate on structure would logically pair “egalitarian” with “hierarchical.” A separate debate concerning function would discuss gender-dependent complementarity versus gender-independent complementarity. Untangling the terms helps us use these terms more accurately. It provokes us to critique our practices in the church and home.

I trust that this issue will nudge us to rethink what God desires in husbands and fathers. Fairy tales couldn't help getting it wrong. We need not.

Together, side by side, in God's world.

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Not Permitting Women to Teach: Reading 1 Timothy in Context

Daniel Gonzalez Gomez

Christians believe that the word of God is inspired and “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16 NIV). This implies that the biblical text sets out transcultural truths valid for the modern world. However, it is also essential that this word of God is understood in its historical and cultural context.

When this principle is expressed, some Christians receive it negatively, as if by considering context we are dismissing the word of God. On the contrary, it does not undermine the importance of the Bible—quite the opposite. Being faithful to the text means, in part, understanding that the New Testament (NT) is comprised of a series of documents written in the first century AD, when the historical and cultural contexts were different.¹ This does not imply that we cannot draw essential lessons from the NT. Rather, it insists that studying these contexts is necessary to understanding what God wants to tell us today.

When I teach about biblical interpretation, I use examples that demonstrate how there are significant themes in the NT to which we are oblivious today. For example, few, if any, of us struggle with the possibility that Jesus did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:2),² with the question of circumcision (a vital issue in the early church, Acts 15:5), with problems between Jews and Gentiles in Rome (Rom 3:1–20), with abuses at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17–22),³ or with food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1–11). Nor do we think the Holy Spirit prohibits evangelizing in Asia (Acts 16:6) or interpret greeting each other with a holy kiss as obligatory (Rom 16:16, etc.). These are a few examples of many texts⁴ that demand we read the Bible in its historical-cultural context.

The case of Paul’s first letter to Timothy is no exception. For most complementarians, Paul’s words in 1 Tim 2:11–12 seem clear,⁵ so they are to be read literally and applied universally: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (NIV).

A literal understanding of this text could not mean that Paul was disallowing a woman, or women in a particular time or situation “to teach [*didasklein*] or to assume authority [*authenthein*]⁶ over a man” (NIV), but instead means that Paul was unequivocally disallowing all women, everywhere, from holding any position of authority in a congregation. Thus, the text is viewed as a perennial truth making a universal prescription.

However, soon after in 2:15, Paul says: “women will be saved through childbearing . . .” (NIV). A straightforward and literal reading would not only lead us to conclude that salvation is by works but also would make salvation contingent on a biological criterion, removing women who are not able to conceive from the possibility of salvation. Are women saved by bearing children, adding their work to the work of Christ on the cross? Most would

agree that this interpretation is absurd. Scholarly tools are needed to understand the intention behind Paul’s words. We find that the method of interpretation applied to 1 Tim 2:11–12—a plain reading with universal and perennial application as logical and necessary—cannot also be applied to 2:15.⁷ Why does a literal reading of 2:11–12 lead to universal applications whereas 2:15 cannot be understood literally, much less have universal applications?⁸

If we wish to understand the biblical text, we need to deepen our investigation. Drawing firm conclusions from isolated verses instead of considering the whole line of argumentation is unfair to the message of the Bible. Since 1 Tim 2:11–12 comes at the end of a larger section of Scripture (2:8–15), we should not make the mistake of reading these verses in isolation.⁹

Furthermore, not everything in this section of the Bible represents an everlasting regulation. In 1 Tim 2:8, Paul desires the Ephesian men to pray by lifting holy hands “in every place,”¹⁰ but lifting hands is not something all Christians do today. However, Paul’s words are clear: He wants men to lift holy hands when they pray.¹¹ Why is this straightforward command from Paul not understood to be a universal command to be applied in perpetuity? Similarly, 2:9–10, which addresses the problem of lavishly dressed wealthy women, is not taken by most Christians to be relevant and applicable for today. Most Christians do not prohibit women from attending church meetings wearing expensive clothes and jewelry or having elaborately braided hair.

**If we wish to understand the biblical text,
we need to deepen our investigation.**

1 Timothy is full of such contextual expressions not directly applicable today. For example, nowadays we are rarely exposed to myths and endless genealogies (1 Tim 1:4). Some Reformed theologians would not advocate for a literal interpretation of 2:4—God “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (NIV)—preferring to read this text as applicable only to certain people.¹² Only a few would defend that the office of bishop is contingent on being married (1 Tim 3:2)¹³ and even having children (3:4). These days, we may not come across the ascetic ideology of Paul’s day that forbade marriage or required abstention from certain foods (1 Tim 4:3). Much less do cessationist ministries advocate that spiritual gifts are necessarily bestowed through prophecy and the laying on of the hands of the council of elders (1 Tim 4:14).

Today, no one tells a congregation member who has lost his or her job and is temporarily unable to provide for his family that they “have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim

5:8). Nor is it advocated that the church should list a widow as a widow only if she is over sixty years of age (1 Tim 5:9–10), or should exclude younger widows from being listed as a widow because they may “want to marry” (1 Tim 5:11–13). We would not propose that young, widowed women get married, raise children, and manage their households because Paul said so (1 Tim 5:14).¹⁴ In the same way, we do not prescribe wine for stomach ailments (1 Tim 5:23) or, more seriously, provide guidance on how to treat slaves (1 Tim 6:1–2).¹⁵ On a theological note, take Paul’s exhortation to his mentee Timothy: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:16). This is not usually thought to imply that Timothy has the power to save himself and others as well. However, if we want to advocate for a literal reading of the text, together with its potential universal applications, we would have to conclude this. But we do not because we would end up with some strange prescriptions and stranger theology.

**All of these examples demonstrate that many
of the parts of 1 Timothy represent specific
guidelines and recommendations that were
in response to problems of the time.**

Conclusion

In summary, all of these examples demonstrate that many of the parts of 1 Timothy represent specific guidelines and recommendations that were in response to problems of the time. This does not indicate that lessons cannot be drawn from the letter, or that there are no perennial truths in it, or that what Paul said to Timothy is not relevant to us today. However, we must not base doctrines on verses taken out of their literary and cultural contexts and, by so doing, undermine the authority of Scripture.

In conclusion, the primary intention of this article is not to imply that Paul was not giving literal instructions to Christians in the first century.¹⁶ Nor is it to argue that Paul’s instructions to Timothy were not relevant and applicable to us today. On the contrary, there are many expressions and declarations in the writings of Paul—and of all biblical authors—that represent truths that we need to submit to, even if they were tackling particular contextual issues of the time. The intention of this article is to make the reader aware that we could become prey to selective interpretation of certain passages in the Bible. For this very reason, it is paramount for Christians to handle the text with care, taking into consideration the whole counsel of the word of God to understand how texts address specific situations and also establish transcultural principles. Reading the Bible without wisdom is surely contrary to Paul’s intent, including reading 1 Tim 2:11–12 as disallowing women—in all places and for all time—to teach, or to hold authority over men.

Notes

1. This includes the sociocultural influences of the time, geographical area, and other contextual aspects such as expressions, style of composition, figure of speech, poetry, etc.

2. Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2000) 146–47.
3. We have, perhaps, changed the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper to something different than what it originally was.
4. For example, cessationists do not think gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and many more that form a central part of many parts of the Bible are active today. They argue that most were used in contextual circumstances during a specific time and then ceased. See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “A Cessationist View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin and Wayne A. Grudem (Zondervan, 1996).
5. This can be extended to vv. 13–14.
6. For other possible translation(s) of *authentēō*, see Philip Barton Payne, *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood: How God’s Word Consistently Affirms Gender Equality* (Zondervan, 2023) 144; Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Baker Academic, 2016) 292. For an analysis of *authentēs*, a cognate of *authentēō*, see Nicholas Quient, “What Does Cain Have to Do with Eve?: Philo’s *Quod deterius potiori insidiari* 1.78 and 1 Timothy 2:12—Exploring an Overlooked Parallel,” *Canadian-American Theological Review* 9/2 (2020) 85–97.
7. Douglas Moo argues that in 1 Tim 2:8–15 the restrictions set by Paul for women are permanent. However, he goes on to explain that although *sōzō* in v. 15 could entail salvation, in this sense it could not mean that women cannot be saved unless they have babies. See Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men?,” ch. 9 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, rev. ed. (Crossway, 2012).
8. See Jeffrey D. Miller, “Saved through Childbearing? 1 Timothy 2:15 as a Hermeneutical Caveat,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 20/2 (Fall 2017) 215–25.
9. Some argue that 1 Tim 3:1 concludes the argument of ch. 2. See Sandra L. Glahn, *Nobody’s Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament* (IVP Academic, 2023) 149.
10. “In every place” (*en panti topō*) is possibly an idiom meaning in “meeting places of the church.” George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 1992) 128.
11. A literal interpretation would also exempt women from doing so.
12. Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Timothy* (SIL International, 2009) 103.
13. Gerry Breshears argued that men should be married to be pastors on Preston Sprinkle’s Podcast “Theology in the Raw.” See 05:20 at: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=TVLX42Sn3s>.
14. The verb *oikodespoteō* can also mean “be the master or steward” (LSJ 1204).
15. See Stanley E. Porter, “Gender Equality and the Analogy of Slavery,” ch. 17 in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Cynthia Long Westfall, and Christa L. McKirland, 3rd ed. (IVP Academic, 2021).
16. I believe 1 Timothy 2:12 is an explicit instruction from Paul. However, what does he mean, given the letter’s context? Is it specific to the Ephesian church? Does it concern one woman or many within that church? Or is it for all Christian women in the first century or still in our day?



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Thomas Aquinas's "Misbegotten" Concept of Women

Joseph E. Early

The influence of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) on Catholic theology is beyond dispute. As important examples, his thought was used to strengthen Church teachings concerning transubstantiation, concerning the concept of the Treasury of Merit, and as an authoritative defense against Protestant charges at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Legend holds that Pope Pius V (1566–1572) revered his teachings so much that he had Aquinas's great work, the *Summa Theologica*, placed on the altar alongside the Bible, as he believed it clarified much of Catholic orthodoxy. Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903), in his 4 August 1879 encyclical, declared that Aquinas's theology was *the* exposition of Catholic theology and should be taught in all Catholic schools of higher education.¹ Aquinas was similarly praised at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Its Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam Totius*, required that a priest's theological education be based on Aquinas's teachings.² Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) stated Aquinas was "a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology."³

In the above instances, Aquinas's theological expressions, praised by the Church, concern primarily his teachings on moral philosophy, ethics, and the sacraments. He also wrote a great deal about the nature, purpose, and role of women, and his voice still resonates in many circles today.

Before the High Middle Ages (1000–1300), the Church's beliefs about women had remained unchanged since the patristic era. Following Augustine's (354–430) teachings, women were not considered to have been created in the full image of God until marriage. The order of creation meant women were expected to be subservient to their fathers, husbands, and possibly, to all men. Like Augustine, most theologians of this era accepted Neoplatonism's dichotomies of body and soul, and of male and female, with all their implications of superiority and inferiority. However, this traditional interpretation of women underwent a significant shift with the emergence of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in the High Middle Ages, a period marked by profound changes in the church's understanding of gender roles.⁴

Aquinas's incorporation of Aristotelian philosophy into Christian theology provided one primary basis of medieval scholasticism. This integration of reason and faith allowed scholars of this period to approach theology and philosophy more rationally. Considered one of the most significant of Western writings, his *Summa Theologica* expresses his thoughts on almost all aspects of theology. Within his *Summa* and other writings, Aquinas provides centuries of scholars who follow him with a detailed depiction of the nature, role, and purpose of women. He does this by discussing women's place and purpose in creation, condition within the image of God, role in the Fall, standing in marriage, and their shortcomings when compared to men. We will treat these topics in the sections following.

Aquinas held that both men and women were created to know God, have a rational soul, and to be in God's image, but to different degrees.

Order of Creation

Unlike John Chrysostom (347–407), Augustine, and several other church fathers, Aquinas had no prior sexual or platonic relationships with women.⁵ His female depictions were based only on philosophy and theology. His lack of female relations caused him to approach the issue detached from emotion. Aquinas held that women have a place in the world since God created Eve. She was, however, created second, and from the man. The woman, therefore, is less complete than the man. Here, Aquinas followed Aristotle's philosophical biology almost to the letter. Based on the order of creation, Aquinas maintained that men had active souls, more muscular bodies, and superior minds. The female, however, was less because she had a passive soul, a weak body, and an inferior mind.⁶ Therefore, men were more intelligent than women and less likely to be attracted to evil. Unlike Aristotle, Aquinas did not believe that the male provided the soul. God provided the soul. The male exerted the force that prepared the female matter to accept the soul.⁷ Following Aristotle's concept of humanity, the male was perfection, and the female was an accident:⁸

As regards the individual nature, a woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex, while the production of a woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes.⁹

If a female child was created, the male was mainly at fault. He did not have enough masculine attributes and his semen was too weak.

Like Augustine, Aquinas believed women's primary purpose was bearing and raising children.¹⁰ "As regards human nature in general, the woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation."¹¹ If not for the need for procreation, a man would find a more suitable partner in another man.¹² Men, therefore, were more noble, and male leadership was a divine and biological necessity. Because of this, the father should be loved more by the child.¹³

Father and mother are loved as principles of our natural origin. The father is a principal in a more excellent way than the mother because he is the active principal, while the mother is a passive and material principal. Consequently, strictly speaking, the father is to be loved more.¹⁴ Eve passed on her inferior traits and material to her daughters.¹⁵ Aquinas's teaching was honored at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), and his “misbegotten” biology continued in the Catholic tradition.¹⁶

Image of God

Aquinas held that both men and women were created to know God, have a rational soul, and to be in God's image, but to different degrees. While Augustine claimed that women were created in God's image only when married, Aquinas saw women as lesser in soul, reason, and, therefore, in image.¹⁷ Aquinas maintained that the image of God was active, formulative, and perfect; thus, males were more in the image of God. Moreover, men were physically stronger, which promoted rationality and made them more adept at making moral decisions. Men, therefore, possessed a high degree of the image of God. Women had inferior bodies and were passive, corporal, and less perfect. Their inferior bodies limited their intelligence and clouded moral decision-making.¹⁸ Women, therefore, were inferior to men in all aspects of the image of God.

Aquinas did not rely solely on Aristotelianism. He also relied on biblical interpretation. By using Gen 1:26–27 as his primary argument and 1 Cor 11:7–9 as secondary, he noted:

The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman. Hence after the words, “To the image of God He created him,” it is added, “Male and female He created them” (Genesis. 1:27). Moreover, it is said “them” in the plural, as Augustine (*Genesis ad lit. iii, 22*) remarks, lest it should be thought that both sexes were united in one individual. But in a secondary sense, the image of God is found in man and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman, as God is the beginning and end of every creature. So when the Apostle had said that “man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man,” he added his reason for saying this: “For man is not of woman, but woman of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man.”¹⁹

Women would gain the full image of God and equality with men only in the resurrection. Unlike Augustine, who believed all souls would be asexual in paradise, Aquinas maintained there would be both males and females in the resurrection.²⁰ Genitals, however, would no longer be of use.²¹

The Fall

Aquinas maintained that Eve was more culpable for humanity's fall, but Adam should never have let the situation occur. Adam had the more significant reasoning ability, a more muscular body, was created first, and was morally superior. She was weak-minded and inferior to Adam.²² She was meant to be subordinate to him. The serpent, therefore, approached Eve because she was easier prey than Adam. As Adam possessed higher reason, he held a higher degree of the image of God and was in charge of the first family. The

fall occurred because Adam failed to take charge of the situation. He allowed his inferior wife to lead, and she led him astray.

Adam and Eve sinned for similar and different reasons. Eve gave in to the serpent because she was weak-minded and prideful and wanted to be like God. Aquinas held that Eve was guiltier than Adam because she sinned and convinced Adam to sin.²³ Adam's motivation to sin was his desire to be more like God and to remain with his wife, from whom he feared God would separate him because of her sin. He did not believe the serpent.²⁴ Adam was guilty because, though he was more intelligent than his wife, he followed her lead. As the head of the family, if Adam had not joined Eve in sin, Aquinas believed the couple would not have been separated or expelled from paradise.

Submission

Aquinas believed that the first couple's punishments corresponded with their designated roles as depicted in creation. Adam must now acquire food by the sweat of his brow. What was once an untaxing task is now laborious. Childbirth was now an excruciating ordeal.²⁵ She was now subordinate to the man in a manner that reflected Aristotelian household ethics.²⁶

Subjection is twofold. One is servile, by virtue of which a superior makes use of a subject for his benefit; and this kind of subjection began after sin. There is another kind of subjection which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subjects for their benefit and good; and this kind of subjection existed even before sin. For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.²⁷

Aquinas believed there were two reasons for marriage. First, it allowed for the procreation of legitimate children. Second, it provided a wife to raise the children. The husband could then be free from many family duties and use his time for intellectual pursuits.²⁸ Each parent, however, had a role in the child's development. The mother worked in the home, and the husband worked in the public sphere. The man, however, was the head of the family, and the wife's deficiencies required his oversight. Aquinas also believed fathers should take charge of their children's education.²⁹ The woman did not have the authority or mental capabilities to ensure success.³⁰ Marriage was also a monogamous relationship. Polygamy was forbidden because it led to strife within the home. The man could not sexually service several women,³¹ and to Aquinas's credit, he recognized that polygamy made the wife only a little more than a slave.³²

Aquinas maintained that the sacrament of monogamous marriage stabilized the home.³³ It provided the man with confidence in his paternity. The sacramentality of marriage symbolized the union of Christ and conferred grace, and so it neutralized the sinful elements of sex.³⁴ If performed for procreative purposes only, sex within marriage was not a sin.³⁵ Aquinas was also willing to make concessions to protect married women. For example, prostitution was permitted as it kept single men from committing adultery with married women.³⁶

Sex

Aquinas believed that the virginal life far surpassed that of marriage. Virginity mirrored the life of Christ and Paul. It was “directed to the good of the soul” and “directed to the good of the body.” Moreover, “venereal pleasures above all debauch a man’s mind.” Quoting Augustine, he stated: “Nothing so casts down the manly mind from its height as the fondling of a woman.”³⁷ Aquinas, however, believed that sex and procreation were a part of God’s original plan for humanity.³⁸ This pre-fall sex would be innocent and dominated by reason. Like Augustine, Aquinas believed that sex in paradise would be passionless; both parties would remain in control of their faculties, so both partners would remain virginal. A woman lost her virginity only after the fall.³⁹

God planned marriage before it was a sacrament, as it was necessary for procreation.⁴⁰ Even though Aquinas viewed it with suspicion, he agreed that sex within marriage was not evil. However, passionate sex with no attempt at impregnation was a venial sin.⁴¹ After having marital sex, neither the man nor the woman should take the Eucharist. Aquinas separated love from sex. All love must be directed at God. Continence allowed one to stay more in control of the rational faculties and thus keep their love directed on God. Because of their inherent material weaknesses, women were more likely to disregard the church’s sexual restrictions. This made women potential temptresses and a danger to men.⁴²

The Virgin Mary

In the Middle Ages, the Virgin Mary was the most significant role model for women.⁴³ Aquinas noted she was “The mother of the Lord being both espoused and a virgin, both virginity and wedlock are honored in the person, in contradiction to those heretics who disparaged one or the other.”⁴⁴ A significant step in Mary’s growing prominence occurred at the Ephesus council in 431, where she was given the title *Theotokos* (“God Bearer” or “Mother of God”). Mary, therefore, did not give birth only to Christ’s physical body but also to his divinity. This finding undergirds the developing belief, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the Immaculate Conception. This taught that since Mary had borne divinity, she had to have been born without original sin.⁴⁵ Aquinas did not believe in her Immaculate Conception. Rather, he argued that if she had not been born in original sin, she would not have needed Christ as her savior.

And thus, in whatever manner the Blessed Virgin would have been sanctified before animation, she could never have incurred the stain of original sin: and, therefore, she would not have needed redemption and salvation which is by Christ, of whom it is written (Matthew 1:21): “He shall save His people from their sins.” But this is unfitting, implying that Christ is not the “Saviour of all men,” as He is called (1 Timothy 4:10). It remains, therefore, that the Blessed Virgin was sanctified after animation.⁴⁶

Aquinas believed Mary was necessary to ensure the universality of redemption. Christ represented men; Mary represented women and their proper role. As she was an auxiliary to Christ, women were to serve as auxiliaries to men.⁴⁷ She was a sexually undefiled woman whom virgins should emulate.

Aquinas was not a misogynist, but his regard for women was relatively low. Because of his stature and other contributions to the Catholic faith, several scholars have attempted to find ways to lessen the impact of Aquinas’s writings concerning women.⁴⁸ This difficult task requires attention to passages where women were included and not denigrated. However, in such passages, women were not central to the issue he discussed. Aquinas should be celebrated for his contributions to moral philosophy, ethics, and the sacraments. His beliefs in these areas are explicit, as are his thoughts on women. Aquinas’s views on the nature, purpose, and role of women were typical of his age, and this should be considered. One could argue that if Aquinas had the benefit of living in the modern era with its scientific understanding of biology, he would not hold some of the positions he held in the Middle Ages.

However, this does not change the fact that he was a medieval theologian who believed that women were lesser than men, should remain in the home, were weak-minded, and that God’s image was dimmer in women than in men. By employing Aristotelean biological concepts, Aquinas believed women were nothing more than defective males whose sole purpose was little more than that of incubators and babysitters. In the modern era, it is evident that many of Aquinas’s teachings concerning women have no scientific merit. However, we cannot turn a blind eye to the negative impact of the teachings of such an influential scholar. Aquinas was brilliant in many theological and philosophical areas, and his contributions to the church are innumerable, but his concept of women was “misbegotten.”

Notes

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2. Pope Paul VI, *Optatam totius* (Oct 28, 1965).
3. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Sept 14, 1998).
4. Marie Anne Mayeski, “Excluded by Logic of Control: Women in Medieval Society and Scholastic Theology,” in *Equal at the Creation: Sexism, Society, and Christian Thought*, ed. Joseph Martos and Pierre Hégy (University of Toronto Press, 1998) 79.
5. Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson, eds., *Women and Religion: The Original Sourcebook of Women in Christian Thought* (HarperCollins, 1996) 79.
6. Aquinas, “Of Incontinence,” *ST*, II-II, I56.1, ad 1, *Summae Theologiae*, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/38901.htm>.
7. Aquinas, “The Order of Charity,” *ST*, II-II, 26, 10. ob. 1, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, in *New Advent*, ed. Kevin Knight, <https://newadvent.org/summa/3026.htm#article10>.
8. Collen McCluskey, “An Unequal Relationship between Equals: Thomas Aquinas on Marriage,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24/1 (Jan 2007) 2.
9. Aquinas, “The Production of the Woman,” *ST*, I, 92, ob. 1, *Summa Theologiae*, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/09201.htm>. Aquinas’s reference to “the Philosopher” concerns Aristotle’s *De Generatione Animalium* iv, 2.
10. Thomas Petri, *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body: The Thomist Foundations of John Paul II’s Anthropology* (Catholic University of American Press, 2016) 106.
11. Aquinas, “The Production of the Woman,” *ST*, I, 92, ob. 1, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/09201.htm>.
12. McCluskey, “An Unequal Relationship,” 5.
13. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Fortress, 1998) 95.
14. Aquinas, “Of the Order of Charity,” *ST*, II-II, 26, 10, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/25910.htm>.
15. Beverly Clack, ed., *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (MacMillan, 1999) 75.

16. Cynthia Russett, "All About Eve: What Men Have Thought About Women Thinking," *The American Scholar* 74/2 (Spring 2005) 43.
17. Margaret A. Farley, "Sources of Sexual Inequality in the History of Christian Thought," *JR* 56/2 (1976) 168.
18. Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination et Equivalence. Nature et rôle de la femme d'après Augustin et Thomas d'Aquinas* (Paris: Maison Mame, 1963), 143.
19. Aquinas, "The End of Term of the Production of Man," *ST*, I, q. 93, art. 4, ad 1, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/09304.htm>.
20. Aquinas, "Of the Quality of Those Who Rise Again," *ST*, Supp., q. 81, a. 3, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/59303.htm>.
21. Aquinas, "Of the Integrity of the Bodies in the Resurrection," *ST*, Supp., q. 80, a.1., <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/59201.htm>.
22. Aquinas, "Of Our Parents' First Temptation," *ST*, II-II, 165.2, a.1, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/39802.htm>;
- Aquinas, "Of the First Man's Sin," *ST*, II-II, 163, a.4, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/39604.htm>.
23. Aquinas, "Of the First Man's Sin," *ST*, II-II, 163.4.c, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/39604.htm>.
24. Aquinas, "Of Our Parents' First Temptation," *ST*, II-II, 165.2, a.1, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/39802.htm>.
25. Aquinas, "Of the First Man's Sin," *ST*, II-II, 163, a. 4, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/39604.htm>.
26. Daniel Mark Cere, "Marriage, Subordination, and the Development of Christian Doctrine," in *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship: The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics*, ed. David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Eerdmans, 2004) 103.
27. Aquinas, "The Production of the Woman," *ST*, I, q. 92, a.1, Reply to Objection 2, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/09201.htm>.
28. Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (University of Washington Press: 1966) 66.
29. McCluskey, "An Unequal Relationship," 5.
30. Aquinas, "Natural Law and Conscience," *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 122, <https://natural-law-and-conscience.org/aquinas-summa-contra-gentiles-book111-chapter-122/>. Hereafter cited as *SCG*.
31. Aquinas, "Of Plurality of Wives," *ST*, Supp., q. 65, ob. 9, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/57701.htm>.
32. McCluskey, "An Unequal Relationship," 6.
33. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council made marriage a sacrament.
34. Aquinas, *ST*, Supp., 42, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/57701.htm>.
35. Since marriage was now a sacrament, Aquinas eschewed the emergence of courtly love. Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, 258.
36. Aquinas, "Unbelief in General," *ST*, II-II, q. 10, art. II, ob. 3, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, in *New Advent*, ed. Kevin Knight, last modified 2017, <https://newadvent.org/summa/3010.htm>.
37. Aquinas, "Lust," *ST*, II-II, q. 153, art. 1, 2, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, in *New Advent*, ed. Kevin Knight, last modified 2017, <https://newadvent.org/summa/3153.htm>.
38. Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 99, art. 2; Petri, *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body*, 221.
39. Børresen, 153.
40. Petri, *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body*, 281.
41. John Giles Milhaven, "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Pleasure," *JRE* 5/2 (Fall 1977) 159.
42. Aquinas notes that some effeminate men may not be in control of their sexual urges and some particularly strong women may be blessed with more fortitude. See "Of the Vices Opposed to Perseverance," *ST*, II-II, q. 138, a. 1, 24, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/37101.htm>; "Of Sobriety," *ST*, II-II, q. 149, a. 4, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/38204.htm>.
43. For an in-depth examination of the development of Mariology see Michael Jordan, *The Historical Mary: Revealing the Pagan Identity of the Virgin Mother* (Seastone, 2004).
44. Aquinas, "Of the Espousals of the Mother of God," *ST*, III, q. 29, a. 1, <http://summa-theologiae.org/question/45101.htm>.
45. The Immaculate Conception did not become dogma until 1854.
46. Aquinas, "The Sanctification of the Blessed Virgin," *ST*, III, q. 27, a. 2, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, in *New Advent*, ed. Kevin Knight, last modified 2017, <https://newadvent.org/summa/4027.htm>.
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The Exhortation to the Husbands and Its Significance in the Conversation About the Household Codes: 1 Peter 3:7

Abeneazer G. Urga

Much scholarly discussion by conservative and liberal theologians focuses on 1 Pet 3:1–6. The submission of wives to their husbands, the exhortation's descriptive or prescriptive nature,¹ whether Sarah addressed Abraham as "Lord" and obeyed him,² the extent of the obedience or submission of wives to their husbands,³ the abuse that this passage has fostered throughout church history,⁴ the function of the participles,⁵ the silent witnessing of the wives,⁶ whether wives are supposed to teach,⁷ and how to live with an unbelieving husband⁸—all these topics have generated discussions and even heated debates.

However, these important conversations seem to neglect the equally crucial following verse: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Pet 3:7; NIV). If it is picked up at all, the discussion of this verse is usually confined to the meaning of the "weaker partner" or "weaker vessel."⁹ As such, this article will show the responsibility of Christian husbands concerning their wives and investigate whether in this text Peter accommodates the Greco-Roman culture to promulgate the oppression of wives. The passage will be analyzed in its social/historical, theological, and literary contexts. This will be followed by a lexical analysis of 1 Pet 3:7. Finally, we consider the theological implications of the passage.

The Social/Historical, Literary, and Theological Contexts of 1 Peter 3:7

In this section, we use the "hermeneutical triad" of social/historical, literary, and theological contexts as an interpretive framework to understand 1 Pet 3:7.¹⁰

As regards the social/historical context, there is a consensus among scholars that in the Greco-Roman society, women were considered to be weak and inferior.¹¹ Wives were not independent, even in choosing their beliefs. The oft-quoted statement of Plutarch in his *Advice to Bride and Groom* demonstrates this reality:

A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Therefore, it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the door tight upon all strange rituals and outlandish superstition. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favor.¹²

The subordination of wives to their husbands with regard to the worship of the Roman gods had political grounds: It curtailed any kind of sedition.¹³ The husband had a state-sanctioned and socially acceptable authority over his wife, children, and slaves as the

The subordination of wives to their husbands with regard to the worship of the Roman gods had political grounds: It curtailed any kind of sedition. The husband had a state-sanctioned and socially acceptable authority over his wife, children, and slaves as the *paterfamilias*.

paterfamilias. For instance, David G. Horrell hints that wives who renounced their husbands' religion could face "criticism and physical abuse" from their husbands¹⁴ or could "face the charge of atheism."¹⁵

With respect to literary context, 1 Pet 3:7 is located in a larger segment (1 Pet 2:11–3:12) where Peter exhorts his addressees to live godly lives among their unbelieving, hostile neighbors. This section of 1 Peter provides the "household codes" (from German, *Haustafeln*). The whole *Haustafeln* hinges on the present, active, imperative verb *parakaleō* ("urge, exhort, encourage") that opens the passage in 2:11. Some even suggest that 1 Peter's ethics wholly depend on *parakaleō*.¹⁶ For Peter, Christians' ethical living as strangers and exiles in the midst of their neighbors is the heart of his argument.¹⁷

1 Peter 3:7 is followed by exhortations directed toward the entire Christian community ("all of you") residing among unbelieving, hostile Gentiles (3:8–12). Peter urges believers to display love and unity among themselves (3:8), followed by a recurrent theme of the epistle: enduring injustice and avoiding any kind of retaliation (3:9–12). Non-retaliation is expected to be accompanied by "courageous witness in the midst of opposition."¹⁸ In summary, 1 Pet 3:7 is located in the extensive ethical section of the epistle (2:11–3:12).

The command to Christian husbands, though brief,¹⁹ is part of the *Haustafeln*. By obeying the command, husbands imitate the holiness of God (1:13–16) and maintain an effective Christian witness for the glory of God (2:12). As concerns the theological context, in 1 Pet 3:7, husbands are urged to treat their Christian wives with honor, as coheirs of God's blessings. Such a call to be different from the surrounding culture, because of the Christian allegiance to, and identity in, the holy God is a major theological theme throughout the epistle. In other words, unique Christian identity is the result of God's mercy (1 Pet 1:3, 2:10).²⁰ As such, they ought to showcase their newfound identity as God's people through an exemplary lifestyle.

The identity of Christians and their relation to the popular culture of Peter's time has attracted a heated debate between David L. Balch and

John H. Elliott.²¹ On the one hand, Balch argues that Peter encourages the “acculturation of [Christians] to the Roman society” for apologetic reasons.²² On the other hand, Elliott proposes that Peter is promoting a significant break or alienation from the society as a sect.²³ Elliott’s proof for the sectarian and countercultural attitude of 1 Peter is the theme of suffering. Elliott writes: “Conflict presents an opportunity and a reason for clarification and reaffirmation of those features of the group which make it distinctive, superior and motivated by a common ‘cause’.”²⁴ However, in a later writing, Elliott accedes to Balch’s criticism that some sort of conformity existed between the Greco-Roman culture and 1 Peter.²⁵ Miroslav Volf suggests a middle ground between Balch and Elliott in his essay titled “Soft Difference.”²⁶ Volf finds “a strange tension in 1 Peter between the stress on difference and attempts at acculturation.”²⁷ In other words, 1 Peter’s theology of ethics simultaneously confirms some aspects of the Greco-Roman culture and confronts/corrects any behavior or action contrary to the Christian identity.²⁸ Difference and distance from the popular culture is vital for witness to the larger culture in which Christians reside as strangers.²⁹

In conclusion, Christians are expected to live a godly, exemplary life that is different from their surrounding culture. At the same time, they are to respect the law of the land by subjecting themselves to it so long as it does not contradict with their calling to be holy as God is holy. It is in this wider theological context of 1 Peter that we need to understand the command to the husbands in 3:7.

Lexical Analysis

In this section, four notable words (“live with,” “weaker,” “vessel,” and “prevent”) that are vital for the text under study are analyzed in light of the Septuagint and the wider NT context. The meaning and usage of these words will be used to clarify the confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the *Haustafeln* in general but particularly the exhortation to the husbands in 1 Peter.

“Live With” (*sunoikeō*)

Peter commands the husbands using a participle (*sunoiountes*) with the force of an imperative³⁰ when he addresses them. Lexicons define it both as “to live with”³¹ and “to conduct oneself in relation to the person with whom one lives.”³²

The term, which occurs only once in the NT, appears in the Septuagint fourteen times.³³ The corresponding Hebrew term usually means “to take a wife” or “to marry.”³⁴ Is the term referring merely to the sexual relations of husband and wife, or does it include marital life in general? Or is it only about husbands engaging in conversation with their wives?³⁵ The term *sunoikeō* is indeed concerned with the general marital life, including sexual relations between husband and wife. It refers to “both its social and sexual aspects.”³⁶ Edmund Clowney is on point to note that the term should not be “limited to sexual intimacy, but it has particular reference to it.”³⁷ J. N. D. Kelly rightly observes that, although the verb accents the sexual relations of husband and wife, it does not exclude the general and mundane relations between husband and wife.³⁸

Husbands are exhorted to live with their wives with consideration or knowledge (“according to knowledge,” *kata gnōsin*) that their wives are weaker than themselves but also that they are “coheirs

of the grace of life.”³⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels comments that “‘living with a woman’ is not a mere physical function but something a man must *know how* to do.”⁴⁰ Others have suggested that husbands should live with their wives with the knowledge of God.⁴¹

“Weaker” (*asthenesterō*)

What does Peter mean when he exhorts husbands that they should consider their wives as “weaker”? The proposed meanings of the term by scholars abound. The term is a comparative adjective employed here to describe the noun “vessel” (*skeuei*). It is usually understood by scholars to refer to the physical weakness of women in comparison to men.⁴²

John C. Nugent, on the other hand, observes that “weaker vessel” does not have a definite article even though most English versions render the clause as if it had one: “*the* weaker vessel” or “*the* weaker partner.” He proposes that “the most natural rendering of this phrase without the definite article would be ‘as with a weaker vessel.’”⁴³ Nugent’s rendering thus avoids the question whether women are “the weaker vessel.”

Peter Davids and others point out that Peter does not state what the weakness of the wives entails.⁴⁴ Nicholas Bott accedes that “the weaker vessel” refers to the physical limitations of the wives, but he goes further and narrows what “weaker” expresses. Peter uses Sarah as his reference point for the wives addressed in the *Haustafeln*: “. . . like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord” (3:6). The intertextual link is with Gen 18:12: “So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure [of bearing a child]?’” Bott insists that the term “weaker vessel” here “opens the possibility of understanding a woman’s physical frailty in a much more restricted, biological sense—reproduction; specifically, the inherent limits of female fertility due to the loss of fertility with age.”⁴⁵ However, by his own admission, Bott avers that this “more restricted understanding of [weaker vessel] may at first appear problematic, since it is unlikely that all women that 1 Peter addresses were (or are) childless.”⁴⁶ The more likely interpretation is that 1 Peter refers to Sarah’s exemplary lifestyle as an obedient and respectful wife. This is not about her barrenness.

Moreover, Bott overlooks that it is not only Sarah who is in view in the *Haustafeln*. Peter mentions more women—though not by name—as exemplary wives (“for in this manner formerly the holy wives,” 1 Pet 3:5). Michaels comments that “the holy wives” possibly refer to Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah.⁴⁷ Therefore, “weaker” should be understood as referring to the “comparative [physical] weakness” of the wives to their husbands.⁴⁸

“Vessel” (*skeuos*)

Scholars have understood “vessel” in various ways. Michaels believes it means “a person” and renders it as “somebody.”⁴⁹ The standard New Testament Greek lexicon understands the term to refer to “woman” here in 1 Peter.⁵⁰ Mark Dubis takes it to mean “both men and women.”⁵¹ Greg Forbes prefers “the human body.”⁵² Sandra Glahn thinks the term “vessel” has “sexual connotations”;⁵³ Bott and Campbell—by gleaning from rabbinic literature and

1 Thess 4:4—also note that the term refers to sexual organs or intercourse.⁵⁴ Nugent argues that of the twenty-two occurrences of “vessel,” “only three of them refer to people”; as such the term should be understood to mean “an instrument or container.”⁵⁵

“Vessel” is used in the NT in various ways: property or equipment (Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 17:31; Heb 9:21), a vessel or container (Luke 8:16; John 19:29; 2 Tim 2:20), a human body (Rom 9:22; 2 Cor 4:7), a human being as an instrument (Acts 9:15), and one’s own wife (1Thess 4:4).⁵⁶ Dubis is correct that though “vessel” here refers to the wives, the comparative adjective “weaker” should be considered in determining the exact meaning of the term. Hence, “vessel” should be understood to refer both to the husbands and the wives but highlighting the wives’ weakness compared to their husbands.⁵⁷

“Prevent, Thwart” (*enkoptō*)

Though this word is a vital term in the exhortation to the husbands, it has not attracted much attention compared to “weaker vessel.” The term appears five times in the NT. In Acts 24:4, when Tertullus presents an accusation before Felix, he asks to be heard so as not to burden (*enkoptō*) Felix further. Paul mentions that he was “prevented” from visiting the Christians in Rome (Rom 15:22). Paul inquires what “prevented” the Christians in Galatia from holding the truth of the gospel (Gal 5:7). Paul is “prevented” from traveling to Thessalonica and visiting the believers there (1 Thess 2:18).

The term also appears in the Septuagint. In Job 19:2 it has the sense of “tormenting,” whereas in Isa 43:23 it means “to burden.” In 1 Peter 3:7, however, “burdening” or “tormenting” does not fit the context. Here in 1 Peter, God thwarting the prayers of insensitive, inconsiderate husbands who are mistreating their wives best expresses the meaning.

Theological Synthesis

Many have asserted that this passage propagates the inequality of women by colluding with the Greco-Roman system. But does Peter perpetuate inequality and abuse in his epistle? Is 1 Pet 3:7 lax compared to the exhortation given to Christian wives? We will now turn to these issues.

Brevity Does Not Indicate Insignificance

Almost every scholar points out the brevity of this text to the exhortations given to the slaves (1 Pet 2:18–25) and wives (1 Pet 3:1–6).⁵⁸ However, brevity does not mean the text lacks the weight of the previous verses. It is because of brevity, it seems, that some consider 1 Pet 3:7 to be an “afterthought rather than part of the larger structure.”⁵⁹ As an example, Horrell writes, “The majority of the instruction is thus directed towards slaves and wives, that is, to the ‘weaker’ social groups within the household structure, specifically those most likely to endure abuse and suffering.”⁶⁰

However, the terseness of the text should not be taken as minimizing the significance of the exhortation to the husbands. It is not merely

an afterthought. Paul, for instance, laying out a similar household code in Eph 5, gives a succinct command to the wives by saying, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord” (Eph 5:22; NIV), yet he devotes the subsequent eleven verses to exhorting the husbands to love their wives. Does this mean Paul shows favoritism by burdening the husbands and giving little attention to the wives? Not at all.

The Matter of Collusion

Did Peter collude with the Greco-Roman culture of his day? Some scholars believe either that Peter completely colluded with the Greco-Roman system or that he did not challenge the culture enough.⁶¹

The argument for the collusion or lack of equal challenge to the husbands is based on the assumption that in the process of conversion to Christianity, Greco-Roman men retained more power and that, compared to slaves and wives, Christian husbands suffered less. Such assumptions are largely (but not totally) wrong. The epistle indicates that the suffering of Christian slaves, wives, and husbands is not given in degrees. Peter does not mention that Christian slaves and wives suffer more than Christian husbands do. In fact, Craig Keener points out that “husbands had more to lose socially from conversion to an unpopular minority religion,” compared to the wives; thus “Christianity spread faster among wives than husbands.”⁶²

Peter indeed critiques the Greco-Roman culture when he urges husbands to live with their wives not only with the knowledge that they are “weaker” (though not weak), but also by “showing honor” to their wives. Steven Bechtler indicates the uniqueness of Peter’s command “to bestow honor on” the wives in the Greco-Roman context.⁶³ He adds that, “from the standpoint of social-scientific analysis of honor and shame, the notion of a husband’s bestowal of honor on his wife is striking.”⁶⁴ Though Peter maintains order in the household, he does not promulgate inferiority between the groups of the household. He exhorts believers to “honor everyone” (1 Pet 2:17a). He also commands Christians to “honor the emperor” (1 Pet 2:17). This “honor” language is applied to the wives. In other words, Christian husbands who are commanded to honor the emperor are at the same time expected to honor their wives. D. Edmond Hiebert notes that “Peter [is demanding] that the wife should be accepted as fully worthy of respect and loving esteem.”⁶⁵

Such demand goes contrary to the broader culture’s understanding of women as inferior. Thus, Peter is urging husbands to reflect a different attitude towards their wives, as opposed to the norm in the Greco-Roman context. Another element that indicates the uniqueness of Peter’s exhortation *vis-à-vis* the broader culture is that Christian husbands are to live in consideration of, and also to bestow respect upon, their wives because the wives are their coheirs. Both Christian husbands and wives are going to “share the same destiny—an eternal inheritance in God’s Kingdom.”⁶⁶

Husbands and wives are equal before God, and there is no distinction or hierarchy in their participation in God’s inheritance.⁶⁷ They “are bound together in the bundle of life.”⁶⁸ By reminding Christian husbands that their wives are coheirs of God’s gracious inheritance, Peter challenges the custom of the day. Karen Jobes observes that

“Peter directly addresses the general Greco-Roman attitude of the inferiority of women by pointing out that the female also is a co-heir of grace and is therefore not excluded from the same privileges of grace enjoyed by the male.”⁶⁹

Carl Gross understands the wives in 1 Pet 3:7 to be non-Christians. He argues that the text should be understood to mean that husbands should honor their wives as those who are heirs of eternal life.⁷⁰ Similarly, Nugent suggests that the wives in view are unbelievers and husbands are supposed to “treat their unbelieving wives with special care [like a weaker vessel].”⁷¹ Though the argument for the unbelieving wives is not conclusive, Gross’s and Nugent’s proposals give no hint that Peter colluded with the Greco-Roman culture or perpetuated the inferiority of women as propounded by the non-Christian setting. To the contrary, both Gross and Nugent demonstrate that husbands are expected to take care of and honor their wives. In so doing, the Christian husbands demonstrate that the Greco-Roman “values [are] . . . incompatible with the values of Christians.”⁷² This ethical incompatibility will indeed result in the suffering and persecution of Christians. The new identity ought to be demonstrated by changed behavior and value systems: in this case, respecting, honoring, and caring for wives.

Warning to Christian Husbands

The glaring oversight in scholarly discussions of the *Haustafeln* is failure to recognize the importance of Peter’s caution. Failure to honour the wife is a hindrance to prayer. Peter’s use of “prevent, thwart” signifies that Christian husbands who fail to heed the exhortation and instead abuse their wives are in danger of their prayers being thwarted by God. This is a severe caution, indeed.

Some scholars, such as Jennifer Bird, do not think this exhortation and warning makes much of a difference. In her view, the brief passage still favors the abusive patriarchal system.⁷³ Bird does not see any ethical difference between the Christian household and the broader culture’s practices. However, evidence for a divine being thwarting husbands’ prayers because of their mistreatment of their wives is unheard of in the Greco-Roman culture. The warning appears to be unique to the NT as well. Husbands are warned that God does not hear those who do not live with their wives with care. God blocks the prayers of abusive Christian husbands, for his ears are only open to those who are righteous (cf. 1 Pet 3:12). The relationship of Christian husbands with their wives determines whether the husbands’ prayers are effective or not. This stern warning to Christian husbands contradicts the claim that Peter is colluding with the culture at large.

Conclusion

We started with pointing out that 1 Pet 3:7 has received minimal attention, and the conversation on the *Haustafeln* is generally concentrated on the exhortation to the wives (1 Pet 3:1–6). As a result, the text is considered separate from its preceding verses or not as potent as the exhortations given to the slaves or the wives. In response to these assumptions, this study demonstrates that 1 Pet 3:7 is a part of the entire *Haustafeln* with equal, perhaps more, weight than the foregoing commands given to the Christian slaves and wives.

The claim that Peter has not challenged the Greco-Roman culture’s worldview regarding the lower view of women is proven wrong based on textual, lexical, and theological evidence. Though Peter affirms order and hierarchy in the household, he does not completely subscribe to the Greco-Roman value system. In fact, 1 Peter illustrates that the reason Christians suffer is because they have a different value system and identity that does not fit with the expectations and ethics of the broader culture. Those who also misread and employ the *Haustafeln* in Peter to carry out any kind of verbal or physical abuse against their wives do not have any warrant whatsoever to subjugate their wives to any kind of violence. To the contrary, Christian husbands are charged with a serious responsibility: to care for and honor their wives, at the severe risk of their prayers being hindered.

1 Peter illustrates that the reason Christians suffer is because they have a different value system and identity that does not fit with the expectations and ethics of the broader culture.

Notes

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 32. L&N 505.
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 39. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 575.
 40. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 168.
 41. The $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\omega$ -clauses provide what kind of knowledge is needed in living with their wives. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 218; Clowney, *1 Peter*, 134.
 42. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 577–78; Glahn, "Weaker Vessels," 74.
 43. Nugent, "The 'Weaker Sex,'" 10.
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 70. Gross, "Are the Wives of 1 Peter 3:7 Christians?," 90–91.
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Male Hospitality: The Bible Sets the Example

Andrew B. Spurgeon

As an Indian, I grew up understanding hospitality to be important. We offered visitors water, coffee, or *chai* as they entered our home. If they came at lunch hour, we invited them to a meal. Hospitality was ingrained in me as a South Asian value. But my mother and sisters prepared the food, set the table, and washed the dishes. Without so many words, I was told that hospitality was not a male's task. I was not invited into the kitchen, and I ate with the guests, unlike my mother and sisters, who served us. This pattern changed when I became a Christian and realized hospitality is as much a male virtue as a female one. When we have unexpected guests, I am the one who fixes supper, since I can cook up quick dishes. When meals are pre-planned, my wife cooks, and I wash dishes.

Hospitality, however, is more than fixing dinners. Among other things, it is about welcoming people, showing them around a city, making them feel comfortable in their new environment, visiting prisoners, caring for migrant workers, taking care of people's emotional needs, helping people with language acquisition, appreciating people with disabilities, helping undocumented migrants, caring for the poor. The two Greek words that best describe hospitality are *philoxenia* and *xenodocheō*.¹ The first is a combination of "love" (*philos*) and "stranger" (*xenos*), and the second is a combination of "stranger" (*xenos*) and "receive" (*docheō*). Hospitality is "a love for the stranger" which leads us to "receiving them" into our home.² Often, people assume hospitality is a friendship extended to someone they know or are acquainted with. But genuine hospitality is a friendship we extend to someone we do not know, such as a traveler, migrant, refugee, or someone who is homeless or socially awkward. It is giving people a safe space where they can be who they are without being afraid. Henri Nouwen writes,

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, and dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.³

In the midday heat, Abraham sat at the entrance to his tent, by the great trees of Mamre, to cool himself. He noticed three men standing some distance off. Immediately, he rose, ran to them, greeted them, and welcomed them to his tent. He washed their feet and invited them to rest while he instructed Sarah to take the finest flour, knead it, and make bread for the guests. He then ran to the herd, selected a tender calf, and gave it to a servant to prepare for a feast. As the meal was being prepared, Abraham returned with curds and milk to offer the guests and waited on them (Gen 18:1–8). Abraham thus set the example *par*

The New Testament has several examples of people showing hospitality to Jesus and his disciples.

excellence of male hospitality.⁴ Other patriarchs also exercised such male hospitality. For example, Lot saw two men (who were angels) coming to his city. Immediately, he got up, met them, greeted them with a respectful bow, and invited them to come to his house. He washed their feet and invited them to spend the night. When they accepted his invitation, he

prepared them bread without yeast. They ate and rested (Gen 19:1–3). Job, too, was so gracious to his visitors that he could proudly claim, "No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler" (Job 31:32).⁵ Others include the father of a woman who hosted her and her Levite husband for four days (Judg 19:1–7), and Laban who took Jacob, a runaway, into his household (Gen 29:13–14).

The NT has several examples of people showing hospitality to Jesus and his disciples. A couple in Cana invited Jesus and the disciples to their wedding as their special guests and received a special blessing (John 2:1–11).⁶ Similarly, the sisters Martha and Mary, of Bethany, invited Jesus and his friends to their home and fed them meals (Luke 10:38–42). Upon being healed from a fever that oppressed her, Peter's mother-in-law got up and served the guests (Matt 8:14–15).⁷ A woman washed Jesus's feet with her tears, wiped them clean with her hair, and anointed them with pure nard (Luke 7:38).

In this article, I will show several examples of men who showed hospitality, starting with the familiar understanding of hospitality—entertaining visitors—and moving to the spiritual elements of hospitality. The goal is to show that hospitality is a virtue all Christians can practice, regardless of gender or culturally assigned roles, and it is a great tool to draw people to our hospitable God. This is needed because, in cultures like mine, even Christians assume hospitality is a female virtue. Churches are no exception: for communal meals, for example, all responsibilities fall on women. Similarly, caring for children in nurseries or teaching Sunday schools is women's responsibility. Hospitality, however, should be every Christian's responsibility regardless of one's gender.

Zacchaeus

The story of Zacchaeus magnificently expresses the primary expression of hospitality. Jesus and his disciples were passing through Jericho. Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, was anxious to see who Jesus was—someone he had heard of and someone people praised. Perhaps Zacchaeus even desired to have an audience with Jesus. But he could not *see* Jesus because of the crowd and his stature. "He was small [*micros*] in his height" (Luke 19:3). Those obstacles did not faze his willpower. He ran ahead of the crowd, climbed a sycamore tree, and waited to *see* Jesus as he passed. His efforts brought him an audience with Jesus, an invitation for Jesus to enter his house and remain (*menō*) and lodge (*kataluō*) with him (19:5, 7).⁸

We have often heard this story and thought Jesus stopped at Zacchaeus's house for supper. However, the words "remain" and "lodge" imply someone spending at least a day and night with someone. Jesus camped at a sinner's house. Zacchaeus, looked down upon because of his profession and stature, became Jesus's host.

Zacchaeus's hospitality, however, did not end with hosting Jesus and his disciples. He voluntarily offered to give away half of his possessions to the poor and repay anyone who had incurred damages because he had misrepresented their case in a law court.⁹ He said he would pay them four times their losses, perhaps including their court and legal fees (19:8).

One act of basic hospitality—showing generosity to someone he secretly admired, Jesus—led Zacchaeus to further levels of hospitality such as caring for the poor and righting the wrongs he had done. That is the beauty of hospitality; once it begins, it causes ripples like a pebble tossed into a lake.

Matthew the Tax Collector

Beside the Sea of Galilee, where tax collectors sat in booths to collect taxes, Jesus's attention fell on Matthew. He invited Matthew to follow him (Matt 9:9).¹⁰ Matthew obeyed and followed Jesus as they made their way to Matthew's house. (Talk about inviting oneself to someone's house!)¹¹ There, Matthew hosted a meal for Jesus and invited his friends—fellow tax collectors and sinners. They all ate together with Jesus and his disciples.

What could have been a happy occasion of celebration turned ugly and awkward when the Pharisees asked the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (9:11). Before they could answer, Jesus came to their defense and said, "The healthy do not need physicians but the sickly do" (9:12). His statement would have puzzled both groups. The tax collectors and the sinners would have been shocked that their invited guests were insulting them by calling them sickly. At the same time, the Pharisees would have agreed that the sinners and tax collectors were sick but disagreed that they needed a teacher like Jesus. Genuine hospitality does not camouflage truth but exposes it. Yes, the tax collectors and the sinners were sickly and needed healing. That was why Jesus invited himself to their house for dinner and fellowshiped with them.

While the tax collectors and sinners had their faults, so did the Pharisees. They did not know God desired his people to show mercy more than offer him sacrifices (9:13). David had said it (Ps 40:6), and the prophet Hosea had prophesied it (6:6), and the Pharisees would have known it but did not apply it in their lives. They should have shown mercy to those tax collectors and sinners. While the Pharisees failed, Jesus offered the tax collectors and sinners God's mercy and called them to have fellowship with God.

Hospitality stems from a person's desire to show mercy (*eleos*) to others. The editors of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the OT) often translated the Hebrew word *hesed* as *eleos*, "mercy." God's *hesed* was his covenantal faithfulness to his people even when they did not follow him. Similarly, if the Pharisees had displayed *mercy* towards the tax collectors and sinners, they

would have joined the dinner. Instead, they did not understand mercy and could not practice hospitality—either to offer it or to receive it.

When the root is rotten, the fruits become inedible and the tree withers. Similarly, when we lack mercy for strangers, we fail in hospitality.

Simon the Pharisee

Jesus had friends in both low and high places. Simon was a Pharisee. He had asked Jesus to eat with him (Luke 7:36).¹² Whether in haste, nervousness, arrogance, or with an air of superiority, Simon failed to have a servant wash Jesus's feet with water, give him a welcome kiss, or anoint his head with the oil of gladness (7:44–46). Nevertheless, they began eating.

As they did, a woman of disrepute found out that Jesus was eating in the house of the Pharisee Simon and came, bringing an alabaster jar. Simon welcomed her into his home, which showed his mercy (unlike the Pharisees who objected to Jesus eating with Matthew). But when she stood behind Jesus's feet, wept over them, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with the perfumed oil from her alabaster jar, Simon's faith in Jesus as a prophet failed. Would not a prophet know that she was a sinner and distance himself from her (7:39)? While Simon wondered about Jesus's prophetic abilities, Jesus read his mind and asked him a question. Would someone who was forgiven a larger debt have greater gratitude than a person who was forgiven a lesser debt? Simon knew the answer. Jesus said that the women's actions were a measure of her sinfulness, the forgiveness she received, and the gratitude she felt.

Simon was a Pharisee and would have meticulously followed the etiquette related to ancient hospitality. Yet, this time he failed, perhaps because he did not care much for his guests. Whatever the reason, he failed in showing genuine hospitality. In his place as a host another uninvited guest made up for what he lacked and thereby received a great commendation from the Lord.

Our failure to recognize the immensity of God's hospitable forgiveness of our sins can prevent us from showing genuine hospitality to someone else. Those who are forgiven the most love the most by showing the most hospitality.

Cornelius the Centurion

Cornelius was a Roman centurion in the Italian Regiment. He and his family were YHWH worshippers who gave generously to the poor and regularly prayed to God (Acts 10:1–3). Because of his piety and generosity, an angel appeared and instructed him to send a messenger to Joppa and bring Peter to their house for further instructions.

In the meantime, Peter debated with God in visions, not wanting to eat food he considered unclean. But the visions were not about food. They were about Peter going as a missionary to non-Jews, especially Cornelius the Roman centurion. Realizing his defeat, Peter went with the messengers to Cornelius's house, shared the gospel with them and, upon their acceptance, baptized them. As Peter shared

the gospel with them, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his family, surprising the Hebrews that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given even to people of other nations (10:44–45).

Cornelius's hospitality—offering alms to the poor (10:2, 4, 31)—was richly rewarded with God pouring his generous gift of the Holy Spirit upon him and his family. Meanwhile, it also taught Peter not to be prejudiced and call people unclean when God has called them clean.

The Philippian Jailer

Paul's hospitality of freeing a possessed slave girl landed him and Silas in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:16–24). About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and fellow prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly, a miraculous earthquake shook the prison's foundations, so the doors flung open and loosened everyone's chains. The jailer woke up, saw the opened doors, assumed every prisoner had escaped and took a sword to kill himself. Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself. We are all here" (16:28). Realizing that his prisoners had not escaped while they could have, the jailer brought a light and fell before Paul and Silas trembling. He asked them what he must do to be saved. They asked him to believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved. He and his family did and were baptized that very night.

His escape from certain death and receiving salvation led him to hospitality. At that hour, the jailer took Paul and Silas, washed their wounds, and fed them (16:33). His salvation from physical and spiritual deaths led him to show hospitality even to prisoners that he was to guard, inflict pain upon, and perhaps kill.

Philip the Evangelist

Eunuchs were people with severed, mutilated, or partial genitals (Matt 19:12). In ancient days, kings appointed them as guards of their harems (2 Kgs 20:18; Esth 1:10). Because of their imperfection, people ill-treated them, but God cared for them. Through Isaiah, he promised them a place within his temple and the walls of the holy city, provided they kept the Sabbath, pleased God, and held fast to his covenant (Isa 56:4–5a). He would give them a name that was better than what sons and daughters had, an everlasting name that would endure forever (56:5).

Centuries later, an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, was reading a scroll of Isaiah (Acts 8:26–40).¹³ He was reading a passage three chapters earlier than where God promised eunuchs a place in his temple and holy city and an everlasting name. He was reading Isa 53:7–8 (Acts 8:32–33). Just then, Philip met him, and asked if he understood what he was reading (8:30). The eunuch invited Philip to climb the chariot and explain the passage to him. Philip, without hesitating to sit with a eunuch, climbed into the chariot, explained the passage to him, showed Jesus to him, and baptized him.

Both the eunuch and Philip showed hospitality to one another. The eunuch invited him to join him in his chariot, and Philip accepted it without hesitation. Because of hospitality, salvation came to that eunuch.

Onesiphorus of Ephesus

One person we rarely hear about yet who refreshed Paul's heart was Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:16; 4:19). In both references, Paul did not greet him but his family, implying that he may have died for his faith. Nevertheless, he refreshed (*anapsuchō*) Paul many a time and was not ashamed of his imprisonments (1:16). The verb *anapsuchō* occurs only in this passage in the NT, but it occurs seven times in the Septuagint, including in the context of Sabbath: "You work six days and cease from all your work on the seventh so that your ox and your donkey rest, and the children of your servants and resident aliens are *refreshed*" (Exod 23:12). Whatever Onesiphorus did for Paul was like fresh cool air that revives a person on a hot day.

The Rich Man in the Parable of Lazarus

The NT also has parables in which men exercise hospitality. Not all men were equally hospitable, leading Jesus to narrate a rich man's life (Luke 16:19–31). He dressed himself in purple cloth—perhaps dyed by the expensive ink of a mussel—and in fine linen and enjoyed a luxurious life.¹⁴ But, he ignored the poor person camped by his gate, a man covered with sores from malnutrition and poor hygiene, whose only companions were dogs that came and licked his wounds. He longed to eat, at least, the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, like dogs that scavenge under masters' tables. Because of his lax hospitality, the rich man found the tables turned in Hades. From there, he saw the poor man, Lazarus, leaning on the bosom of Abraham, an imagery of luxury, while he was thirsty and miserable. So, in agonizing heat, he begged Father Abraham to have pity on him and send Lazarus to dip the tip of one of his fingers in water and cool his tongue. Abraham refused.

Parable or real, this story illustrates the consequence of inhospitality. Times can change when the wealthy become poor and need the help of the poor that they once ignored. Were the rich man hospitable to the poor man, perhaps Lazarus would have welcomed him into eternity (Luke 16:9).

The Good Samaritan

Although only a story, the story of a kindhearted Samaritan traveler shows a hospitality that transcends racial hostility. Knowing his time had come for him to be tried and killed, Jesus left Galilee and traveled towards Judea (Luke 9:51). The Samaritans would not let him pass through their village, angering John and James, but not Jesus (9:52–56). Within this context, a scribe wanting to justify himself as a righteous person asked, "Who is my neighbor?" (10:29). The Lord replied with a story.

A traveler between Jerusalem and Jericho fell victim to the attack of the robbers, who stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and left him to die—events that would soon happen in Jesus's life. First, a priest came by and saw the wounded man. Instead of helping him, he walked to the other side of the road and continued his journey. Soon, a Levite did the same. Thirdly, a Samaritan came by. He saw the wounded man, took pity on him, bandaged his wounds after pouring oil and wine on them, placed him on his donkey, took him to an inn, gave the innkeeper money for the man's rest and medicine, and continued his journey after promising to repay whatever expenses the

innkeeper occurred from caring for the wounded person (10:30–35). The Samaritan's hospitality overcame his prejudice against Jews, unlike the people of a Samaritan village who would not let Jesus pass through and unlike the disciples who wanted to bring fire from heaven and destroy their enemies, the Samaritans.

Genuine hospitality goes beyond racial and caste prejudices to help those in need. A wounded person is an injured person regardless of his/her ethnicity, color, race, caste, creed, or gender. Everyone is obligated to help them and show them hospitality.

The Hospitable Father

Seeing Jesus gladly welcoming tax collectors and sinners and eating with them, the Pharisees and scribes murmured: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1–2). So, the Lord told a parable about a father and two sons (15:11–32). Whereas the older son stayed home, obeyed his father's laws, and did not fellowship with sinners, the younger took a *portion* (*meros*) of his father's livelihood/business (*ousia*), went away to a foreign land, and spent his wealth with sinners.¹⁵

Soon, the younger brother found himself in a predicament: He was out of wealth and friends and had to eat food meant for pigs, an animal abominable to the Jews. So, he decided to return to his father, fearing what his father might say and willing to offer himself to be a servant on his father's estate. Upon seeing him, however, the father was filled with compassion, ran to him, threw his arms around him, hugged him, and kissed him (15:20). He commanded his servants to bring the best robe to put on his younger son. He gave him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet (15:22). He instructed the servants to kill the fattest calf and throw a feast to celebrate his son's return—one who was *dead* and now was *alive*, who was lost and now was found (15:23–24).

The father's hospitality angered the older brother, who did not waste his father's wealth. How could the father show such generosity to a wasteful son? Yet, the Father's heart was for the *dead* but now *alive* son. Amos Yong has rightly said, "Christian hospitality is grounded in the hospitable God who through the Incarnation has received creation to himself and through Pentecost has given himself to creation."¹⁶ Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors to reflect his Father's heart.

Others

In days when people enslaved people, Philemon, we can infer, modeled hospitality by accepting a runaway slave as a Christian brother. In addition, he hosted a church in his house (Phlm 1:1–2). He had a spare bedroom for the apostle Paul (Phlm 1:22). Aquilla and Priscilla hosted apostles and churches in their homes in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome (Acts 18:1–3; 2 Tim 4:19; Rom 16:3). Other men who hosted churches in their houses include Narcissus (Rom 16:11), Asyncritus (16:14), and Philologus (Rom 16:15).

The entire epistle of 3 John emphasizes the importance of hospitality. The elder, most likely John the son of Zebedee, wrote to Gaius, perhaps the leader of a local church. Gaius had been a faithful minister and a hospitable guest to Christians and strangers (*zenos*, v. 5). As such, those visitors told others of his love (v.

6a). The elder exhorted Gaius to continue to practice such love in hospitality (v. 6b) for it would benefit ministers who traveled around without seeking help from unbelievers (v. 7). In short, all Christians must show such hospitality towards anyone who does God's work (v. 8). Like Gaius, Demetrius practiced hospitality to the point that everyone spoke well of him (v. 12). In contrast, Diotrephes refused to show hospitality to itinerant visitors such as the elder because he loved himself foremost (v. 9). His love for himself and lack of hospitality led him to speak ill of others, even of an apostle (v. 10a). He inhospitably refused to welcome other Christians (v. 10b). Worse still, he prevented others from showing hospitality (v. 10c). Believers must not imitate such evil (v. 11).

The same elder's other two letters, 1 John and 2 John, explain that one should mix discernment with hospitality to avoid mishaps such as hosting false teachers and encouraging their teaching. The elder wrote to "the chosen lady": "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching [of Jesus's incarnation], do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work" (2 John 1:7, 10). The churches and Christians should be quick to show hospitality, but with discernment. However, fear of false teachers should not prevent one from showing hospitality.

**Genuine hospitality goes beyond racial
and caste prejudices to help those in need.
Everyone is obligated to help them and
show them hospitality.**

Benefits of Male Hospitality

In cultures that prohibit female interaction with non-family members, like Abraham's culture, men play a key role in hospitality. Zacchaeus might have had a wife and family, but Jesus was an unknown member and a leader in the community. As such, Zacchaeus took the lead in hosting him. Similarly, Matthew, the tax collector, would have been a prominent rich man in his city, and he invited Jesus and his friends to his house for a fellowship meal. Simon was a Pharisee, an elite in his culture. He alone could have invited Jesus, another rabbi, to his house for a meal. Similarly, even now, in some cultures, fathers and husbands alone can create an atmosphere of hospitality.

Ancient cultures and some modern Asian cultures forbid physical touch between opposite sexes. Bowing low (as in Korea and Japan) or cupping one's hands together in a gesture of respect (as in Thailand and India) are the extent of one's expression of respect for the person of the other sex. In such contexts, once again, it is men who can show gestures of kindness to other men, such as the embrace and the kiss the father in the parable offered his son.

Even now, in many cultures, when the male head of a household converts to Christianity, others in the family spontaneously became

Christians. This should motivate evangelists to focus their ministries on men as fathers and husbands. Their hospitable reception of the Christian faith will open the way for others in the family to follow.

Male hospitality allows access to risky situations, as in the case of the Samaritan who stopped on a dangerous route to attend to a man recently attacked by bandits. This was perhaps why many of the apostles and earliest missionaries were men traveling together in dangerous situations to spread the gospel, the good news of God's welcoming, hospitable arms.

Conclusion

I have shown ample examples of real or parabolic men who led the way to help, host, treat, heal, and protect someone. As mentioned earlier, in patriarchal cultures such as in India, hospitality is seen as a female virtue. When a party is planned, the women always take the lead in organizing, cooking, and cleaning. It should not be so.¹⁷ Hospitality is everyone's responsibility. This was why Paul, Peter, and the author of Hebrews instructed Christians, male and female, to show hospitality.

- Pursue hospitality (*philoxenia*, Rom 12:13).
- Forget not hospitality (*philoxenia*, Heb 13:2).
- Overseers and elders must be hospitable (*philoxenos*, 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8).
- All believers must be hospitable (*philoxenos*) to one another without murmuring (1 Pet 4:9).

The author of Hebrews even gave an incentive to practice hospitality: "By showing hospitality, some people accidentally hosted angels" (13:2). I am sure he had in mind Abraham, Gideon, and Cornelius, who hosted angels without knowing it. The same was true of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. Because of their hospitality, they saw the resurrected Jesus before his twelve disciples did. Hospitality has its rewards. Let us be quick to show hospitality to bystanders, wanderers, immigrants, refugees, the homeless and, yes, even fellow Christians and family members.

Notes

1. *Philoxenia* occurs in Rom 12:13 and Heb 13:2; *xenodocheō* occurs in 1 Tim 5:10. The cognate *philoxenos* ("hospitable") occurs in 1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:8, and 1 Pet 4:9.
2. Mounce writes, "In a day when inns were scarce and not always desirable, it was critical for believers to extend hospitality to Christians (and others) who were traveling." Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC 27, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery (Broadman & Holman, 1995) 263.
3. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Image, 1986) 68–69.
4. This story can be seen also from the guests' perspective, showing another element of hospitality: Ross writes, "Abraham's visitors meant to convey intimate fellowship. To eat together was important for fellowship, peace offerings, and treaties. When the Lord was ready to specify the fulfillment of the covenantal promise, He came in person and ate in Abraham's tent. Nothing could more significantly communicate their close relationship." Allen P. Ross, *Genesis*, 2 vols., The Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor, 1985) 1:59.
5. All translations are by the author.

6. Johnson Thomaskutty writes, "The word *eklēthē* (*invited*) reveals that Jesus and his disciples were attending the wedding as invited guests. Asian readers can relate to this story as marriage functions are part of social relations, and people get together during such occasions." John: *A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*, *Asia Bible Commentary*, ed. Andrew B. Spurgeon (Langham Global Library, forthcoming in 2024).
7. Uytanlet and Kwa suggest a possible supernatural attack in this scene: "[Matthew] says that Jesus rebuked the fever (Luke 4:39), and two verses later, he rebuked the demons (4:41). This may be a hint that the fever of Peter's mother-in-law was a symptom of demonic activities; although this is difficult to ascertain." Samson L. Uytanlet and Kiem-Kiok Kwa, *Matthew: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*, *Asia Bible Commentary*, ed. Federico G. Villanueva (Langham Global Library, 2017) 61.
8. Bock writes, "[Jesus] stops and tells him to come down from the tree, because he 'must' (*dei*) stay at his house today. Jesus' stay with the tax collector is a necessity because it pictures what his ministry is all about—to lead to God those whom others have given up on, to call those who, like the tax collector Levi, need to repent (5:31–32)." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan Academic, 1998) 479.
9. The Greek verb *sukophanteō* meant "to falsely accuse someone" or "slander" (LSJ).
10. Jesus inviting ordinary people into his father's rule signifies hospitality. Ordinary people, no less a tax collector like Matthew, would have never envisioned having a role in God's rule, but that was exactly what Jesus was offering. That itself is a divine hospitality—accepting the undeserving in his kingdom and offering them a privileged place!
11. Keener writes, in the context of Zacchaeus, "No matter how high their status, people did not normally invite themselves to someone else's home." Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity, 1993) 241.
12. Whereas Jesus lodged (*menō* and *kataluō*) with Zacchaeus and reclined for a meal (*anakeimai*) with Matthew, Simon had asked him to eat with him (*phagō*), and Jesus sat (*kataklinō*). Perhaps these verbs show levels of intimacy and hospitality.
13. For more on this queen, see Heather Preston, "The Kandake: A Missing History," *Priscilla Papers* 37/4 (Fall 2023) 16–19.
14. George writes, "The purple dye used to color his outer garment was from the mollusk (an invertebrate, like a slug), from which a single drop of dye could be extracted. This dye was unlike the cheaper purple dye extracted from the beetroot. Therefore, it would have taken thousands of such mollusks to dye a single outer garment, implying the expense the rich man incurred in dyeing this garment." Benjamin George, "Principles from the Parables in Serving God in the Mission Field," *Leitourgia—Christian Service, Collected Essays: A Festschrift for Joykutty M. George*, ed. Andrew B. Spurgeon (Bangalore: Primalogue, 2015) 218.
15. Sadly, often teachers and preachers connect the "portion of his livelihood" (*meros ousia*), perhaps an allowance a rich father gave his son, with his inheritance (*kleronomia*), although the text does not make this connection.
16. Amos Yong, "The Spirit of Hospitality: Pentecostal Perspectives toward a Performative Theology of Interreligious Encounter," *Missiology* 35/1 (Jan 2007) 62.
17. In one of the most outstanding examples of female hospitality, Jesus encouraged Martha to slow down and focus on learning rather than spending all her time preparing food for others and being frustrated with her sister for not helping (Luke 10:38–42).



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Keeping God's Big Picture in Mind When Power Threatens Relationships: A Sermon on 1 Peter 2:18–3:7

Jeff Miller

When I visit this congregation with which I've had a long relationship,¹ there are always two things in my mind—the big picture and the little picture. The big picture, for me, is my family's fifty-plus-year relationship with this congregation. The little picture is what's going on that particular day. For example, a few years ago I played the piano at their Christmas Eve services. That event, for me, was a snapshot within the big picture.

When I played for that Christmas Eve service, I wasn't able to think about, let alone bask in, the big picture very much. Why? Because of the little picture—the task at hand. Because the songs had notes, chords, rhythm, and tempo. Imagine if I had played the wrong Christmas carol, in the wrong key, at the wrong tempo. And then, after the service, when people asked me what had happened, I simply said, “Hey, I was basking in the big picture, soaking in how cool it is to be here at my home church.”

This big-picture/little-picture scenario is an illustration for what we're doing when we read and apply the Bible to our lives.

To put it plainly: In the Christian life we should try to be aware of the big trajectory that we're on, and also aware of the small parts we play in it. And when we read the Bible, we read both to find out what their specific situation was, and also how they fit in with God's big plan.

A Chosen People

The key to what 1 Peter means and how it applies to our lives is to figure out how it fits into the big picture.

So, let's back up and find out a bit about that big picture. Then we'll spend some time on the specifics of our 1 Peter text for today.

A couple weeks ago, the sermon text was 1 Peter 2:9, which begins, “You are a chosen people.” This “chosen” language helps us identify what parts of the Bible story Peter has in mind. It makes me think, first, of Abram and Sarai.

Back in Genesis 12, God spoke to Abram.

The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth
will be blessed because of you.” (Gen 12:1–3 CEB, italics added)

I took us back this far, all the way back to Genesis, because it's important to remember why Abram and Sarai were chosen. Their

status as called was never intended to make everyone else feel unchosen. No, Abram and Sarai were chosen to be the first of many. They were blessed first so that others could also be blessed later. They were chosen first so that others would also be chosen later.

And when Peter used this “chosen” language about 2000 years later, he was reminding the first-century Christians that they are on that same trajectory. They are among those whom Genesis calls “all the families of the earth.” Now it's another 2000 years later, and we too are among the chosen. Abram and Sarai were blessed so that others could also be blessed. They expanded to a family, to a people group, to a nation; they were spread out far beyond their own land; then, after Christ, ethnic barriers were set aside, and in the 60s AD Peter is writing to the multi-national ethnically diverse chosen church . . . and he wants them to remember *why* they were chosen: They were blessed so that others could also be blessed.

That's the big picture, the overarching trajectory. Now let's shift to today's sermon text, which is the small picture. But make no mistake, the small picture is not unimportant, and it almost always feels like it's the big one.

In fact, in the case of 1 Peter, the small picture is of a challenging situation—that of persecution. Persecution was real back then, as it is in many places today. That's why the topic of suffering keeps coming up in the sermons you've been hearing on 1 Peter. Simon Peter himself was killed for being a Christian leader within a few years of writing this letter.

Slavery

The specific text for today comes in two parts; it starts in 2:18 and continues into chapter 3. The first part is about slavery, the second is about marriage. Let's read the first four verses:

Household slaves, submit by accepting the authority of your masters with all respect. Do this not only to good and kind masters but also to those who are harsh. Now, it is commendable if, because of one's understanding of God, someone should endure pain through suffering unjustly. But what praise comes from enduring patiently when you have sinned and are beaten for it? But if you endure steadfastly when you've done good and suffer for it, this is commendable before God.

You were called to this kind of endurance, because Christ suffered on your behalf. He left you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps. (1 Pet 2:18–21 CEB)

As we get into this text, we're looking at what is commonly called a “household code.” It's a set of instructions for the various members of a household. The key to understanding a household code is to notice how it differs from the norm—first-century Roman culture.

Here's a quick illustration using a different genre: Instead of a household code, think about a recipe. When you eat something that tastes amazing, you might wonder, "What's the secret ingredient?" If you ask for the recipe, it's because you want to know what's making it so different. You already know what's the same—what's typical.

Household codes were common in the ancient Greek and Roman world. So, we want to know how Peter's code differs from the ones widely known in his generation. What are its secret ingredients?

The first difference to notice is that Peter addresses slaves, but not masters. This was not common; it is the opposite of the norm. This difference, of not addressing slave owners, would have caught the attention of Peter's early readers.

Reminding you again of earlier sermons in this series, this letter has a lot to say about suffering. I'm sure you'll agree, slaves suffer much more than their masters do. Think of it this way: When the stock market crashed between 1929 and 1932, about 4,000 US banks failed. There was a lot of suffering, and thousands of sermons addressed that suffering from various angles. But I'm sure no one preached about how failing banks were causing hardship for bank robbers. Just like preachers didn't give bank robbers advice about how to handle the economic crash, Peter doesn't give slave owners advice about how to handle the hardship of slavery.

The text we've read thus far ends, "follow in his footsteps." Peter has used the suffering of Christ as motivation for enduring suffering as Christians. But Christ not only endured the suffering, he also acted for the good of those who caused his suffering! You remember his words: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34 KJV). That takes us back to the big picture. For Christ, in that moment, the snapshot was enduring the pain of the cross and the big picture was remembering his purpose for going to the cross. The big picture was about saving humanity, so his actions in the moment reflected that.

For the slaves Peter is addressing, the snapshot is enduring the suffering, the indignity of slavery. But they are not only slaves; they are Christians too, so the big picture for them is what we already talked about: the trajectory of chosen-ness and blessing. We are blessed to be a blessing, so we strive not only to endure oppression but also to act in the best interest of our oppressors.

Marriage

In chapter 3, the text shifts from slavery to marriage:

Wives, likewise, submit to your own husbands. Do this so that even if some of them refuse to believe the word, they may be won without a word by their wives' way of life. After all, they will have observed the reverent and holy manner of your lives. Don't try to make yourselves beautiful on the outside, with stylish hair or by wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes. Instead, make yourselves beautiful on the inside, in your hearts, with the enduring quality of a gentle, peaceful spirit. This type of beauty is very precious in God's eyes. For it was in this way that holy women who trusted in God used to make themselves beautiful, accepting the authority of their own husbands. For example, Sarah accepted Abraham's authority when she called

him *master*. You have become her children when you do good and don't respond to threats with fear. (1 Pet 3:1–6 CEB)

This paragraph connects to the previous one with the word "likewise." Some translations say "in the same way." Peter uses this transition to indicate that the two topics, slavery and marriage, are two applications of the same principle.

This connection of slavery and marriage, which may not be obvious to us, prompts me to bring up an important aspect of understanding and applying the Bible. The Bible frequently addresses issues that we are not currently facing. But that doesn't mean no one is facing those issues, or that such Bible passages are irrelevant. In situations like this, we are to discern and apply the principle behind the text. We need to know *what* Jesus and the Bible authors said, but we also need to know *why* they said it.

That matters here because Peter is applying the same principle to two different situations—slavery and marriage. That principle is to live out your Christian calling in light of the big picture of God's plan, even when you're suffering, when you're powerless or oppressed.

So why does Peter address wives as if they are powerless and oppressed? The broad reason is that wives in his day were essentially always under the authority of their husbands. The more specific, more pressing reason is that Peter is talking to Christian women *who are married to non-Christian men*. That's a very specific challenge. He's not talking about marriage in general; he's talking about Christian wives married to non-Christian husbands.

I hope you now see the connection between slavery and marriage: *In this context*, they are related because Peter is talking to Christian slaves under the authority of non-Christian masters and Christian wives under the authority of non-Christian husbands.

A household in the Greco-Roman world worshipped the gods that the husband and father did. He had the authority to govern the household's worship practices. That raised a particular problem for these Christian wives:

- Do I worship pagan gods because my husband says to? No.
- Do I demand that my husband worship Christ? No.
- Do I leave my husband? No.
- Do I argue with him about it? . . . No. Instead, what does the text say? Win them over *with your conduct, without a word*. Not by making demands. Not by debate. But by your conduct.

Now, is Peter saying it's never acceptable to use words? Of course not! He himself is writing the letter, using words! But Peter is in position of authority, and the wives he has in mind are not. People paid respectful attention to Peter. But back then, husbands tended not to pay respectful attention to wives. The context matters. He's not saying that no wife in any century on any continent in any circumstance should explain the gospel to her husband. No, he's giving savvy advice to women in a unique and difficult situation.

A principle behind his advice is to act for the good of others—in this case an unbelieving husband—so that they too will come to

faith in Christ. Another principle at work here is to use what you can for the gospel. If you're in a situation where words work best, then speak up. If you're in a situation where actions work best, then jump into action. If you're a writer, write. If you're a singer, sing. If you have stage fright, then work behind the scenes.

And if you were a first-century woman living in a harshly patriarchal world and you had come to Christ but remained married to a non-Christian husband, and your whole culture was telling you to worship his gods instead of Christ, then Peter would be speaking directly to you.

He wasn't speaking directly to you, or to us, was he? He didn't know about us. But because his words are inspired Scripture, they apply to us. My point in this part of the sermon is that *the principle behind the words always applies*, even when the words themselves don't seem to.

That's a terribly important distinction here in this text. So please hear this: *If Simon Peter knew that this text has often been used to keep abused wives from seeking safety, he would be devastated.* So, before we go on to the next part of the sermon text, I need to say that neither I, nor the leaders of this congregation, would advise an abused wife to stay in her situation in hopes of converting her husband to Christ. Some preachers do say that, *and they are wrong.* We don't help bank robbers by letting them hang out at the bank. And we don't help abusive husbands by telling their wives to hang in there. In fact, such a husband will much more likely be converted to Christ if he is confronted with his sin and helped to reform his life, than if he is allowed to continue in sin unchecked.

Peter now turns to the husbands:

Husbands, likewise, submit by living with your wife in ways that honor her, knowing that she is the weaker partner. Honor her all the more, as she is also a coheir of the gracious care of life. Do this so that your prayers won't be hindered. (1 Pet 3:7 CEB)

Let's unpack this verse phrase by phrase: First, notice the "likewise" toward the beginning. Peter is still on the same topic. This suggests that he has in mind Christian husbands married to non-Christian wives. He's still addressing the imbalance of a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian.

His first instruction is to "submit by living with your wife." That is, don't separate from your wife because she isn't a Christian. That would ignore the big picture! We are blessed to be Christians in order to spread that blessing to others. So don't miss the opportunity to spread that blessing to the person closest to you—which in this paragraph is a non-Christian wife, and in the previous paragraph was a non-Christian husband.

The next phrase in the verse is "in ways that honor her, knowing she is the weaker partner." The Greek word translated "partner" is often translated as "vessel." It can refer to various household items, but usually to a bowl or dish. Here, of course, it's a metaphor for a wife. So, what does Peter mean by "weaker vessel"? I admit that it's hard to know for sure.² Here are two options:

One possibility is that Peter is referring—not to the physical or emotional weakness of individual women—but to the vulnerability of wives in

general in that society. Women had fewer rights and fewer freedoms than men. Marriage was harder on women than on men. Marriage was more dangerous for women than for men. So, Peter may be referring to their vulnerable status in society and in most households.

Another possibility is that Peter is referring, not only to the male/female distinction, but to the Christian/non-Christian distinction. He's saying to these husbands: You are the Christian in this relationship, so recognize that your non-Christian wife is in a vulnerable spot. She may fear that you'll leave her because of your new faith. She may fear that you'll force her to convert, maybe even physically force her.

Conclusion

Let's take a couple minutes to recap. There are three big take-aways:

First, when we seek to apply the Bible to our lives, we are looking for the principle—the why—behind the text. At face value, today's text is for slaves and for Christians married to non-Christians. But the principles that Peter depended on have lessons for all of us—including those of us who are not slaves and are unmarried. How do we find those principles? By diving into the biblical text, reading it carefully and prayerfully, by comparing translations, by reading high-quality Bible study materials, by interacting with mature teachers and mentors.

Second, ask how you and the text you're reading fit into God's big picture. And the one that helps us here is God's calling to Abram and Sarai, which established them as chosen and blessed. Peter calls his readers "a chosen people." We, like Abram and Sarai, have been called, chosen—not to make other people feel un-chosen, but to work for their good. And doing so—keeping that big picture in mind—is most difficult when you're in relationship with a non-Christian who has power over you.

There's a third principle. It's an overarching principle that applies to a lot more than our sermon text today or to the other sermons in this series. Here's the principle: Jesus is Lord. When someone has power over you, even to the point that they think they are your master, remember that *Jesus* is your master and theirs. And, vice versa, when you have power over someone, don't lord it over them. Christ is Lord of *both* of you. Jesus is Lord of all.

Notes

1. When first preached, the sermon introduction established that I (Jeff Miller) was preaching at my home congregation, which I have long since left but where I still have many meaningful connections.
2. CBE's resources on this difficult text include Michal Beth Dinkler, "Sarah's Submission: Peter's Analogy in 1 Peter 3:5–6," *Priscilla Papers* 21/3 (Summer 2007) 9–15 and John C. Nugent, "The 'Weaker Sex' or a Weak Translation? Strengthening our Interpretation of 1 Peter 3:7," *Priscilla Papers* 32/3 (Summer 2018) 8–11.



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Apples and Oranges? Re-evaluating “Egalitarian” and “Complementarian” in the Gender Debate

Joshua Kenneth George

The discourse on the male-female gender dynamics, at least within evangelical Christianity, often revolves around the assumption that “egalitarian” and “complementarian” are accepted terms referring to the two opposing views. Following a 1986 convention organized by the Evangelical Theological Society on gender roles, two distinct camps emerged, each representing contrasting views that persist to this day.¹ Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) advocated for the egalitarian perspective that men and women share equal authority both within the church and in the home. On the other hand, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) asserted the complementarian position of male authority and female subordination, while emphasizing the different roles and equality of both genders before God. The book, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, part of the Counterpoints series, reinforced these positions.²

This article challenges this framing of the discourse within Christian circles, particularly with respect to the use of the terms “egalitarian” and “complementarian” as accurately representing the primary distinctions of each position. It argues that egalitarianism and complementarianism should not be treated as opposing viewpoints within the same debate but rather as separate discussions in themselves. The term “egalitarian” is related to structures and hierarchies, while the term “complementarian” or “complementarity” focusses on distinctions in nature and function.

Currently, the discussion has conflated both structure and function into the same debate, leaving little room for nuance. By carefully examining the meaning of each of these terms and analysing the historical development of this discussion, we will show the need for a shift in the framework of the discussion. So, while agreeing that both structure and function are relevant to the gender debate, we ask if they should constitute an opposing pair. Simply put, are we comparing apples with oranges simply because they are both fruits?³

**Egalitarianism and complementarianism
should not be treated as opposing viewpoints
within the same debate but rather as separate
discussions in themselves.**

Historical Development of the Terms

A historical examination of the gender debate within Christian circles reveals an array of terminology used to frame the discourse over time. Those who have engaged with the debate have not always considered “egalitarian” and “complementarian” as terms to represent opposing views. The following historical survey confirms this.

1970s: Traditionalist vs. Egalitarian/Biblical Feminism

The debate on the role of men and women in the church emerged alongside the second wave of the women’s movement in the 1960s and 70s, a period marked by the growing assertion of women’s rights and participation in various societal domains.⁴ The prevailing social narrative of this era emphasized the equality of women, advocating for their unrestricted engagement in the workforce and in public life, grounded in their status as fully autonomous individuals with equal rights. Conversely, traditional perspectives upheld the notion of women’s domestic roles and prescribed behavioural norms aligned with this societal position. The women’s liberation movement contested these traditional views, with some advocating for equality, and others proposing the superiority of women over men. Additionally, some espoused the belief that gender differences were socially constructed, challenging the notion of inherent distinctions between men and women.

In response to the women’s liberation movement, authors like Virginia Mollenkott urged the church to earnestly confront and reassess traditional gender roles both within the household and the ecclesiastical sphere.⁵ One seminal work that stirred considerable discussion was that of evangelical authors Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty in 1974. They advocated that the church should acknowledge the intrinsic worth of women as human beings, equally bearing the image of God.⁶ They contended equality between men and women: “Only as all human beings—male and female—are regarded as being equally in a condition of need before God and equally recipients of his love and grace can the message of Christ be considered good news for women.”⁷

The book received various responses from evangelical circles spurring the emergence of both radical (Evangelical Women’s Caucus) and conservative (Christians for Biblical Equality) groups lobbying for the equal status of men and women in the church and at home.⁸ At this point, these two groups constituted the egalitarian viewpoint in the gender debate. The debate itself was framed as the “traditional” view versus the “egalitarian” view, as seen, for example, in an article published by *Post-American* magazine in 1975. Here Thomas Howard argued for “A Traditional View,” and Donald Dayton argued for “An Egalitarian View.”⁹ In 1979, Dallas Theological Seminary published an article that reworked the polar terms: “Traditionalist versus Evangelical Feminism.” The new term was to emphasize that the view was based on the Bible rather than on culture.¹⁰

Thus, by the end of the 1970s, the spectrum had an egalitarian/evangelical feminism point of view at one end, representing the newly awakened sense of equality and freedom among women. At the other end was the existing traditionalist view that advocated fixed roles and structures for each gender.¹¹ Worth noticing is that each point of view conflated the structure (of the relationship between men and women)

with nature/function (of men and women). This is a point that we will pick up in the next section.

1980s: Hierarchical vs. Egalitarian

Towards the end of the 70s,¹² it became increasingly evident that the term “hierarchical” more aptly expressed a contrast to the term “egalitarian.” For instance, Susan Foh (1979), advocating from the traditionalist/hierarchical stance, explicitly endorsed the “hierarchical model”¹³ in response to the egalitarian model. She argued:

To try to support the egalitarian model with Ephesians 5:23–24, one’s conception of Christ must be seriously damaged. The relationship between Christ and his church must be understood as a hierarchy; if it is not, Christ as the unique God-man is lost. . . . In the summary of marital duties (Eph. 5:33), nothing new is mentioned for husbands. But a new thought is introduced with reference to wives: they should fear their husbands. . . . the Christian is both to love and fear God (Ps. 34:8–9; Prov 1:7; 31:30; Deut. 11:1), and the Christian wife is both to love and fear her husband. This fear is not cringing before a hand that is quick to strike or a tongue quick to lash. “Fear” for the wife involves valuing the authority or headship of her husband. This attitude is necessary for proper submission. . . . the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife do not contradict “the reciprocity of mutual respect, self-sacrificing concern, and deep affection,” advocated by marriage-egalitarians. Both hierarchy and mutuality are required in the Christian marriage.¹⁴

Based on the hierarchical relationship between Christ and the church that Foh saw in Eph 5, she inferred that the same should exist between a husband and his wife. An understanding that the subordination of the wife should involve “fear” further emphasises that she saw this as an unequal relationship—a hierarchical one, and therefore, one based on the structure of the relationship between men and women.

A further example of the terms “hierarchical” and “egalitarian” being paired is by Dayton and Thomas (1975), who proposed that, “the real question—at least for most Christians [is]: Which of these views (the hierarchical or the egalitarian—or perhaps a synthesis of the two) has the clearer grounding in scripture?”¹⁵ Hierarchical was seen as naturally contrasting with egalitarian. Framing the debate along the same lines is egalitarian author Mary Evans (1983): “Paul presents us with a picture of marriage that is amazingly egalitarian . . . It is often suggested that the use of such terms as ‘head’ and ‘submission’ is evidence that Paul did see a hierarchical order in marriage, but . . . these terms are not necessarily used in that way.”¹⁶

On a side note, some, such as Stephen Clark (1980) felt the need to qualify the hierarchical view by proposing that women could still be considered equal to men while being subordinate to them. He argued: “The head and subordinate can both be of equal worth and value. In fact, they can be equal in many other ways, and still be in a relationship involving subordination. The subordinate can even be of greater rank and dignity, as Jesus was in relationship to his parents.”¹⁷

Shirley Lees (1984) brought together the various existing views under the series “When Christians Disagree,” in which the authors used the terms “hierarchical,” “traditional,” and “egalitarian” to describe the existing views.¹⁸ Carb Hoch (1987) summarised the three main views on the gender debate as being “the non-evangelical egalitarian, the evangelical egalitarian, and the hierarchical.”¹⁹ From these examples, we can conclude that the discussion at this stage was how each group understood the structural relationship between the two genders.

The implications of these points of view for church leadership were collated in the 1989 publication *Women in Ministry: Four Views*. The four different views were: “traditional,” “male leadership,” “plural ministry,” and “egalitarian.” The traditional view proposed that women should refrain from involvement in ministry altogether. The male leadership view endorsed limited involvement as long as it was under male leadership, conforming to the hierarchical position. The plurality view negated any necessity for ordination itself and thereby avoided gender arguments. Conversely, the egalitarian view supported the full participation of women in all forms of service and ministry.²⁰

It appears that the four views each primarily represent how men and women are structurally related to each other. From the standpoint of structure, each goes on to prescribe restrictive or liberative roles and functions for women in ministry. Thus, the traditional and male leadership views restrict women because they see women as structurally subordinate to men. The plural ministry and egalitarian views agree on a non-hierarchical relationship between men and women but arrive at different implications. The plurality view sees the need to do away with hierarchy altogether, while the egalitarian view rejects any restrictions on the roles and functions allowed to women. Here again, the debate has conflated structure and function into a single topic of debate.

1990s Onwards: Complementarian vs. Egalitarian

It was only in 1991 that the term “complementarian” was first used to describe the position that was previously referred to as either hierarchical or traditional. Wayne Grudem, one of the primary founders of the CBMW and coeditor of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, said:

If one word must be used to describe our position, we prefer the term *complementarian*, since it suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women. We are uncomfortable with the term “traditionalist” because it implies an unwillingness to let Scripture challenge traditional patterns of behavior, and we certainly reject the term “hierarchicalist” because it overemphasizes structured authority while giving no suggestion of equality or the beauty of mutual interdependence.²¹

Here, Grudem’s choice of word to describe CBMW’s position was not based on their differences with the egalitarian camp, nor on a unique characteristic of CBMW’s position. Rather, it was based on what they felt was comfortable and convenient—a point we will discuss in the next section.

To summarise the history of the terminology: In the 70s, the egalitarian position was contrasted against the traditionalist position. Further, in the 80s it was placed against the hierarchicalist position. In fact, at that time, James Beck (egalitarian) and Craig Blomberg (complementarian) described the traditionalist positions as just another version of the hierarchicalist position.²² It would thus be accurate to assert that, based on the historical usage of the term, “egalitarian” (with its emphasis on equality) should be paired opposite “hierarchicalist” (with its emphasis on ranking).

Scholarly Disagreement over Terms

After the publication of CBMW’s book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, a number of publications acknowledged the terms each group had chosen, yet expressed doubt that the term “complementarian” accurately described the CBMW’s position. For example, Kaye Cook and Lance Lee, while accepting that the neo-traditionalists had rechristened themselves as complementarian, went on to recognise that despite this, egalitarians did not stop subscribing to complementarity.²³ Craig Keener highlighted that it was indeed a challenge to use a term to accurately describe each view and yet keep both camps happy:

Each title risks misrepresenting the other side of the debate: most “complementarians,” for example, insist on the equality of persons (while maintaining gender-assigned differences in role). “Egalitarians” reject hierarchy yet accept the reality of (nonhierarchical) gender differences, hence speak of man and woman as complementary.²⁴

Mary Osburn felt the need to qualify the complementarian view as being hierarchical complementarianism.²⁵ William Webb suggested that the appropriate terms to describe the two opposing positions should be termed complementary egalitarianism (the egalitarian view) and ultra-soft patriarchy (the complementarian view).²⁶ Millard Erickson argued instead for the terminology pair “egalitarian complementarians” and “hierarchical complementarians.” His rationale was that, “The question is not whether the roles are different. It is whether the difference necessarily involves one person having the final authority in decision making. . . . That assumption is that if there is difference in role, there also must be difference in relative authority.”²⁷ Meanwhile, some scholars continued to use the term “biblical feminism” to describe the egalitarian position.²⁸

In 2004, Grudem published a book that analysed over a hundred questions raised against the complementarian position. One such question involved the use of the term “complementary” to describe the egalitarian position, as in Webb’s coinage of the term “complementary egalitarianism.” Grudem replied:

Complementarians will consider Webb’s terminology offensive and confusing. As a cofounder of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in 1987, and as a co-author of the complementarian book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, I wish to lodge a protest against Webb’s use of two terms. His phrase “complementary egalitarianism,” which he uses to describe a thoroughgoing egalitarian position, simply confuses the issues by using complementary

for a position totally antithetical to what complementarians hold. . . . Since that time, complementarian has been the term we have consistently used to describe our position, and it has been widely (and courteously) used by others to describe our position as well. For Webb to apply it to an egalitarian position is to needlessly confuse the issues. . . . It would seem more appropriate in academic debate, and indeed a simple matter of common courtesy, to refer to positions by the terms that the representatives of those positions choose for themselves rather than by pejorative terms that they reject.²⁹

In response to Grudem’s claim on sole right to use the word complementary to be limited to the position held by the CBMW, a number of critical points need to be made. First, in the quotation above, Grudem claims that the descriptor “complementarian” has been widely used by others to describe the CBMW position. However, this is not completely true. As seen in the historical debate, up until 1991, “complementarity” had not been used to describe any one position in the spectrum. Moreover, the appropriate usage of the term was challenged even after the term was chosen. The term “complementarity” was often used by authors from both camps to emphasise that men and women are different from each other.

Secondly, the choice to use the word “complementarian” to describe the CBMW position was not based on the unique emphasis of their position. Rather it was chosen because it was the term they were most comfortable with, finding that it conveniently obfuscated role complementarity with male authority. An analogy would be the debate between infant baptism and adult baptism. Let us say the adult baptism camp chose to describe their position as “water baptism” because (a) water was a key element of their baptism, and (b) because baptismal age was not their only consideration. Eventually, they might argue that since they coined the term “water baptism” to describe themselves, they had sole right to the term—even though infant baptism also uses water.

Erickson responded to Grudem’s claim for sole right to the term “complementarian”:

By way of contrast, there is nothing in the usual definition of the term that carries the restrictions that Grudem’s use of it entails. . . . Whether getting a concept and affixing one’s term to it, or taking over a term and attaching it to one’s meaning, the endeavor is similar. This means that in my judgment these persons have engaged in stipulative definition and have usurped a term that probably should be shared.³⁰

Thirdly, and in line with Erickson’s comment, it seems that Grudem’s use of “complementarian” includes the elements of both equality and distinction. However, the term “complementarian” can be used to describe the concept of distinction in the context of equality as well as hierarchy. Erickson, as we have already cited, argued: “I find a better distinction to be between egalitarian complementarians and hierarchical complementarians. The question is not whether the roles are different. It is whether the difference necessarily involves one person having the final authority in decision making.”³¹ Lucy Peppiatt similarly said that if a complementarian would claim that he or she sees men and women

coexisting and working together in reciprocal, harmonious, and interdependent relations, the conditions of this reciprocity, harmony, and interdependence are grossly imbalanced because the conditions of the relations have been established on unquestioned notions of male authority and power. The complementarity of these relations will only endure for as long as a woman agrees to renounce authority, power, and autonomy in favor of a man, for the common good.³²

Thus, a more appropriate description of the two camps would be “complementarity with hierarchy” (complementarian) and “complementarity without hierarchy” (egalitarian). In fact, in the 2004 book *Discovering Biblical Equality*—which was a response to CBMW’s 1991 publication—the subtitle was, appropriately, *Complementarity Without Hierarchy*.³³

It appears, then, that there was no clear consensus within academic circles as to the terms to describe each position accurately. It often depended on what one was arguing against. For example, when arguing against the traditionalist position, the preferred opposing position seemed to be biblical feminism, which referred to progressive thinking on the role of women. When one described one position as being hierarchical, the appropriate counter term of choice was “egalitarian.” “Complementarity,” as a term, was unique. It was used by both camps to describe the fact that men and women have inherent differences that can complement each other.

A fuller enquiry into the meaning of the terms “egalitarian” and “complementarian” will aid in using these terms appropriately in the gender debate.

Understanding the Terms

Let us first consider the term “egalitarian.” When used in the discussion on gender, both within and outside theological circles, it refers to the understanding that all people, in this case both men and women, are equal. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explains that, “an egalitarian favors equality of some sort. . . . People should be treated as equals, should treat one another as equals, should relate as equals, or enjoy an equality of social status of some sort.”³⁴ Within the gender debate in Christian circles, egalitarianism is similarly understood as referring to biblical equality. The emphasis is on the biblical aspect, as this understanding is drawn from the Bible and not from society or culture. Hence, the position of egalitarianism within the theological gender discourse would be that both men and women are equal, and that:

maleness and femaleness, in and of themselves, neither privilege nor curtail one’s ability to be used to advance the kingdom, or to glorify God in any dimension of ministry, mission, society, or family. . . . Biblical equality, therefore, denies that there is any created or otherwise God-ordained hierarchy *based solely on* sexual difference. Egalitarianism recognizes patterns of authority in the family, church, and society—it is not anarchistic—but rejects the notion that any office, ministry, or opportunity should be denied anyone on the grounds of being male or female. This is because women and men are made equally in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:27), equally fallen (Rom 3:23), equally redeemable through Christ’s

life, death, and resurrection (Jn 3:16), equally participants in the new-covenant community (Gal 3:28), equally heirs of God in Christ (1 Pet 3:7), and equally able to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit for life and ministry (Acts 2:17). In short, this is the essence of biblical equality.³⁵

Contrary to what is sometimes falsely assumed, the subscribers of the egalitarian view within evangelical circles never denied inherent differences in gender. They have always subscribed to gender differences but recognised that those differences cannot place members of one gender at a higher level than the other. What is clear from this description is that egalitarianism has to do with structures and power dynamics. The natural opposite position to egalitarianism would be an acceptance that there exists some form of hierarchy between men and women, or that gender differences lead to one gender having authority over another. This has been acknowledged, as seen earlier, by a number of Christian scholars.

In fact, by 2001, despite the two views at either end of the spectrum of the gender debate being established as the complementarian view versus the egalitarian view, in the book *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, the editors highlighted that “it seems to us that hierarchicalist is the more natural opposite to egalitarian and more clearly describes the essence of the position—that in certain contexts there are relationships of authority and submission in which gender roles may not be reversed.”³⁶ However, according to Stephen Lowe, those who subscribe to the hierarchicalist position also believe men and women are equal. This equality is thought to be only soteriological; that is, it operates within the spiritual realm or in the spiritual position of men and women before God. Sociologically or functionally this equality may not exist.³⁷ Egalitarianism, on the other hand, would entail comprehensive equality, both soteriological and sociological.

The term “complementarian,” on the other hand, has nothing to do with power or with structures. Complementarity, from which the term is derived, has to do with how different entities work together. This concept exists across disciplines including, and not limited to, theology, physics, genetics, economics, and psychology. For example, in his 1970 book *Interaction Concepts of Personality*, re-published in 2019, psychologist Robert Carson speaks of complementarity in the context of human interactions and interpersonal relations.³⁸ Complementary human interaction could take place in a dominant-submissive relationship or an equal-affiliation relationship.³⁹ In the field of economics, it can be used synonymously for “synergy” and involves “studying the interactions among pairs of interrelated decisions.”⁴⁰ Within genetics as well, complementarity involves studying how genes interact with each other. For example, if one organism carries a defective mutation of a particular gene, but mates with another organism which has a functional version of that gene, the functional gene from the second organism can complement the defective gene from the first organism, resulting in a normal expression of that genetic characteristic in the offspring.⁴¹

In other words, complementarity refers to the principle or phenomenon where two or more different entities or processes are interdependent or interrelated. These entities or processes complement each other by fulfilling different functions that

contribute to a synergistic whole. Right from the beginning of the gender debate, complementarity was understood in this way. Scanzoni and Hardesty, when describing four ways different religions have understood the relationship between men and women, said that within complementarity, “the sexes are viewed as different but complementary. Each sex is considered equal in worth but has its own sphere to fill. An overlapping of the spheres is precluded or at least discouraged; rather, they are considered counterparts, rounding out, reinforcing, and supplementing one another.”⁴² Clark, who argued from a hierarchical position, also agreed that “the New Testament approach attempts to create ‘one person,’ a husband and wife united, but with a division of labor that allows each to extend the ability of the other to function. The husband and wife become engaged in a relationship of reciprocal service and interdependence without competition. They are, in short, complementary in role.”⁴³ Evans, from the egalitarian camp, saw complementarity not only as difference but also as the need to complement or complete each other when she said that, in the Bible,

the relation between men and women is presented in terms of the three principles of diversity, unity, and complementarity. There is diversity in that they were created distinctly and differently and that distinction can and must never be negated; unity in that they are one in Christ and stand side by side as heirs of God, and complementarity in that they are interdependent and each needs the other if their lives are to be lived as God intended them to be.⁴⁴

What we see in the idea of complementarity is a clear distinction between the two genders, but also the need for the genders to work together as one. Complementarity can work within hierarchy or apart from it. Thus, we can define complementarity as having to do with nature and function, but not with structure. As such, it would be inappropriate to pair it with egalitarianism, which concerns itself with structure.

The issue with the complementarian position is that it unhelpfully conflates the concepts of hierarchy (structure in relationships) and complementarity (function in relationships). What is a way to undo this tangle?

A Suggested Way Forward

So far in this article, we have argued that the terms “egalitarian” and “complementarian” should not be construed as an opposing pair at the ends of a spectrum. Scholars who have identified this issue have suggested alternative terms but have continued to keep them paired. For example, Peppiatt (2019) argued that the accurate terms to describe the two positions should be “hierarchicalist” and “mutualist.”⁴⁵ Here again we see a pairing of structure (hierarchicalist) with function (mutualist), comparing apples and oranges rather than like with like.

Traditionally, theological debates visualized as a spectrum often have opposing viewpoints at either end with a common variable being expressed at varying degrees through the spectrum. This common variable allows adherents of each view to recognize that they are discussing the same issue but also to see their unique

perspectives being represented. However, this is not the case when we consider the terms egalitarian and complementarian.

Additionally, from a practical standpoint, most adherents of the egalitarian view recognise that they also endorse complementarity (the differences between the genders) but cannot use the term complementarian, as it represents the opposing camp. Likewise, complementarians also believe that men and women are equal before God but refrain from using the term egalitarian. Conflating structure and function can also result in strawman and false analogy fallacies where opposing camps are falsely accused of promoting views they do not subscribe to. For example, since egalitarians believe in the equality of genders, they have been falsely accused of rejecting any distinctions between the two genders or even rejecting the need for gender.

One way to remedy the misrepresentations is to recognize the accurate meanings of the two terms and, based on this, develop two distinct debates.

Debate 1: Gender Structure

Peppiatt (2019) argued that the accurate terms to describe the two positions should be “hierarchicalist” and “mutualist.”

Proposed Terminology: Egalitarian vs. Hierarchicalist

Within evangelical circles, both camps have emphasized the equality of both genders in relation to God. However, they have not agreed on whether that equality carries over into the social relationship of men and women. As discussed earlier, hierarchicalism, though recognising that men and women are equal in status before God, does not require that theological equality be extrapolated into sociological equality. They see that women need to submit to men unidirectionally.

However, egalitarians hold to comprehensive equality. They are not against hierarchical structures, which they concede may be necessary for effective function. For egalitarians, these structures are not gender-based. This is what is unique about the egalitarian position when compared to the hierarchicalist position: absolute equality as against sociological hierarchy.

Based on this, a simplified spectrum to describe whether men and women are equal in relation to each other could be egalitarian versus hierarchicalist. In this opposing pair, egalitarians recognize that men and women in the church and at home rank equally and hence, mutually submit to each other. Hierarchicalists believe that sociologically, men rank above women, and hence, the woman needs to unidirectionally submit to the man. This opposing pair is based on the element unique to each position and dissolves the confusion arising from lack of clarity.

Debate 2: Gender Function

Proposed Terminology: Gender-dependent Complementarity vs. Gender-independent Complementarity

As discussed earlier, complementarity has to do with distinctions in nature and function. Gender complementarity would recognise that men and women are distinct in nature, but how those distinctions impact their functioning would be a matter of debate.

The *gender-dependent complementarian* would argue that there is a purpose for this distinction and hence it does influence how they function in the roles they are given. The biological differences, for example, influence how men and women experience and respond to the world around them, and this impacts the way they function. Both genders may occupy a particular role, but their gender distinctions would, to some extent, influence the way they function in that role. Moreover, they are not meant to function independently (Gen 2:18) but rather, interdependently. Such a view emphasises the need—for example, in a family—for both the mother and father to contribute, but in distinct ways. This view thus values gender distinctions as God-given—not as a means to restrict what roles men and women play but as a means to offer variety in how they function in those roles. In other words, this view would argue that due to their distinctions, the genders gainfully complement one another. It must be noted that gender here is not the sole contributing factor towards complementarity, since personality differences and cultural differences could also contribute positively. However, the point here is: Gender impacts functioning.

Alternatively, the *gender-independent complementarian*, while acknowledging biological differences, would deny any functional distinctions between genders. All roles can be equally and completely fulfilled by either gender independently. Functioning in a role should be based on ability, training, gifts, or even calling. As a result, there is no need for men and women to work together or complement each other. Teams can be all men or all women as long as they have the right gift-mix. This view can also be termed as gender non-essentialism. Maleness or femaleness does not add anything to how one functions. Simply put, gender does not impact functioning.

How would these two separate debates, one on structure and one on function, take shape in real-life? The debates could potentially produce four different combinations for the church and home. The reader can ask which combination describes their own position best.

Position 1: Egalitarian + Gender-dependent Complementarian

A certain person could be egalitarian (structure) and gender-dependent complementarian (function). Their position would be that in the *church* leadership roles are open to both men and women. Both are encouraged to bring their unique gender perspectives to their roles. Teams are intentionally mixed-gender to benefit diverse viewpoints.

At *home*, they would support that spouses make decisions together, with equal say in matters and both partners taking on any household role or responsibility. Gender uniqueness is recognised, which leads to valuing the unique gender perspectives contributing to the overall

functioning of the home. There are some things that mothers and fathers would do differently. For example, a mother may understand and empathise with her daughter who is going through puberty in a way that the father does not. She then brings that expertise to their parenting and decision-making regarding that particular issue. The father could also contribute, but in a different way. Together they provide what they individually could not.⁴⁶

Position 2: Egalitarian + Gender-independent Complementarian

A second possibility is that a person is egalitarian (structure) and gender-independent complementarian (function). Their position in matters of *church* would be similar to the first scenario, however, gender would be seen as non-essential or irrelevant to how they function in their roles. There is no need for teams to include both genders, as their gifting or ability would be sufficient.

At *home*, decisions are primarily based on expertise and ability. All roles can be equally and efficiently performed by either gender without any gender-unique input from either spouse.

Position 3: Hierarchicalist + Gender-dependent Complementarian

In a third scenario, let's say a person is hierarchicalist (structure) and gender-dependent complementarian (function). They would hold that in the *church*, only men can occupy certain authority or leadership positions. Women are seen as valuable, as they bring in their gender-unique perspectives to the roles they are permitted to function in. Their contributions are seen as vital to the healthy functioning of the church.

At *home*, the husband is considered the head of the home and final decision maker. Input from the wife is valuable but has to be submitted to the husband as his *helper*. Gender-unique contributions from both spouses are seen as vital for the healthy functioning of the home.

The discourse surrounding gender function and structures within Christianity has long been framed as egalitarian versus complementarian.

Position 4: Hierarchicalist + Gender-independent Complementarian

A final possibility is that a person is hierarchicalist (structure) and gender-independent complementarian (function). Their position in the *church* would be that men occupy all positions of authority and leadership and do not see the input of women as necessary. Women can serve and function in certain roles but are not seen as vital. At *home*, husbands are the head of the home and capable of making all decisions. As gender is non-essential, apart from their expertise or abilities, wives do not have any unique contributions to make.

Conclusion

The discourse surrounding gender function and structures within Christianity has long been framed as egalitarian versus

complementarian. However, a historical analysis of these terms shows that the debate has not always been framed in this way. An examination of the wider use and meaning of these terms persuades that they cannot be posed against each other. By disentangling the conflated discussions on gender structures and gender functions, a more inclusive approach can emerge.

The debate on gender structures is more accurately captured as: egalitarian versus hierarchicalist. This debate addresses the fundamental question of whether, within the church and the home, men and women stand in an equal relationship or in a hierarchical relationship. The debate on gender functions is more accurately depicted as gender-dependent complementarity versus gender-independent complementarity. This debate concerns itself with a focused examination of whether inherent differences between genders necessitate distinct roles and interdependence, or whether gender is irrelevant in the functioning of roles.

Further research is required to validate the appropriateness and practical applicability of these terms. However, carefully identifying and separating out the opposing pairs allows for a more precise and constructive dialogue, enabling participants to engage with the specific nuances of each discussion without conflating disparate issues. In other words, we are finally comparing apples with apples and oranges with oranges.

Notes

1. Mimi Haddad, "History Matters," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Cynthia Long Westfall, and Christa L. McKirland, 3rd ed. (IVP Academic, 2021).
2. James Beck and Craig Blomberg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, Counterpoints (Zondervan, 2001); James Beck, ed., *Two Views on Women in Ministry – Revised Edition*, Counterpoints (Zondervan, 2005). The shifts that took place in the revised edition included, first, that one editor from the original edition, Craig Blomberg, replaced one of the contributors of the complementarian position. Second, the contributors of each position responded to each essay as opposed to the only the editors doing so in the original edition.
3. As the scope of this article is limited to discussing the terms used, it refrains from extensively engaging with the Scriptures or arguments underpinning each position.
4. Introduction to Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts* (IVP Academic, 2019).
5. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "The Women's Movement Challenges the Church," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 2/4 (Sept 1974) 298–310, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164717400200408>.
6. Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Westminster John Knox, 2004) 312.
7. Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* (Word, 1974) 15–16.
8. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 312.
9. Donald W. Dayton and Thomas Howard, "A Dialogue on Women, Hierarchy, and Equality," *The Post-American* (1975), <https://sojo.net/magazine/may-1975/dialogue-women-hierarchy-and-equality>.
10. A. Duane Litfin, "Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It," *BSac* 136/543 (1979) 258–71.
11. Litfin, "Evangelical Feminism."
12. Robert Johnston, "The Role of Women in the Church and Home: An Evangelical Testcase in Hermeneutics," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Eerdmans, 1978) 236–38.
13. Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) 200.
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46. This view in no way undermines single-parent homes or questions a single parent's effectiveness in being a good parent. This is only describing a situation where both parents are present.



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Book Review: “*Silence In Translation*”: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in Myanmar and the Development of a Critical Contextual Hermeneutic

By Anna Sui Hluan (Langham Academic, 2022)

Reviewed by Kimberly Dickson

“*Silence*” in *Translation* is the published version of Anna Sui Hluan’s PhD dissertation, which examines the Judson Burmese translation of 1 Cor 14:34–35. Deeply researched and meticulously argued, a book review can scarcely capture all that she has covered. She devotes a large section to comparing the Greek and Burmese translations that could be skipped or browsed by most readers unfamiliar with these languages. Even so, readers stand to gain insight into important hermeneutical issues that need to be considered when doing Bible translation.

Hluan concludes that a new type of interpretation should be used, which she names a Critical Contextual Hermeneutic. Her approach provides a promising tool for anyone involved in Bible translation and interpretation in cross-cultural contexts. Sui Hluan’s specific context, Myanmar, offers a case study for this approach. Focusing on Adoniram Judson’s translation and the cultural context of Myanmar, she provides practical examples of how the translator’s context, the receiving culture’s context, and the biblical context are all distinct critical contexts that must be evaluated in translation.

When evaluating 1 Cor 14:34–35, Sui Hluan makes her threefold concentration clear. Through detailed research, she establishes Judson’s nineteenth-century American missionary background, which uncritically accepted patriarchy. Though his translation reflected his era’s beliefs that men should be in authority over women, his life and the lives of his wives (Ann Hasseltine 1812–1826, Sarah Hall Boardman 1834–1845, and Emily Chubbuck 1846–1850) demonstrated a belief that women can and should lead in many ministry outreaches including occasional preaching. This view is reflected in his translation of the Greek word *lalein* (“to speak”), which occurs in v. 34 and again in v. 35, as “to preach.” Rather than limiting all women’s speaking, he limited only preaching. However, as Hluan points out, in the Myanmar context, combined with the Greek word *sigao*, “silence,” in the same passage, the effect of the translation has been to limit women’s speech and leadership.

Turning first to women’s speech, her explanation of silence in the Myanmar context is enlightening. Myanmar’s culture has been deeply impacted by authoritarian rule that dates from imperial reigns prior to colonialism, to the current post-colonial period. Giving practical examples, she explains that submissive silence is expected by all who are not in authority (22). Silence is further reinforced through Buddhism, the major religion of Myanmar. As she says, silence governs “the relationship between rulers and ruled, men and women, and parents and children” (322). And regarding women, “women’s silent submission, and shame if this virtue is violated” are central to the culture (251). Even within church leadership, this silence ensures that the “leaders” have absolute authority and power, which is not questioned by other men. This dynamic has created church leadership in direct opposition to Jesus’s teaching, which requires that whoever wants to be great must be the servant of all. Culturally, when applied to women—who in Myanmar culture are considered inferior to men—the term “silence” does far more to limit women than Judson likely ever meant to communicate in his translation (28, 40, 252).

Hluan then evaluates the biblical context of this passage. Recognizing the disputes about this text’s context and its effect on translation, she broadly compares and contrasts scholarly views and then details the approaches of Wayne Grudem, Ben Witherington, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, whom she identifies as complementarian, biblical egalitarian, and Christian feminist, respectively. She sees that, despite disagreement on the cultural issues in Corinth, scholars place a huge emphasis on these issues as key to the interpretation of this text (287). She provides a fair background for each scholar, and analyses how their approach may be relevant to the Myanmar context. She offers what she finds most helpful from each in the Myanmar context. Concluding that the perspectives of Grudem, Witherington, and Schüssler Fiorenza are too centered in their American cultural backgrounds, she includes work from theologians more overt about contextual issues in interpretation.

Hluan concludes that, contrary to Grudem’s views and the fundamentalist beliefs of Myanmar churches, the status of women should not be defined by the consequences laid out in Gen 3, but rather through the redemption of Jesus and the ethics of Gal 3:28 (249). With a whole-Scripture approach, she recognizes the counter-cultural actions of Jesus and Paul, which she brings to the interpretation of this difficult text (317). She notes the many women Paul references as coworkers, the situations where he obviously expects that they are not silent, and the 1 Cor 11 passage addressing women’s attire when praying and prophesying in the church (290). She concludes that 1 Cor 14:34–35 is context-specific, meaning, it addresses a specific issue of disorderly worship in Corinth (304). Agreeing with Schüssler Fiorenza that Paul references a Roman law that limits women’s speech, Hluan points out that Myanmar has no such laws (310, 313, 315, 316). Thus, the passage cannot be uncritically applied across time and cultures (316–17).

Quite appropriately, she concludes her book by comparing her approach to one of the first female evangelical translators, Katharine Bushnell. In the same way that Bushnell saw that male interpreters had reinforced translations that discriminated against women, Hluan sees the current Burmese translation discriminating against women in Myanmar (328–29). She understands that to challenge Myanmar’s respected Judson translation will bring controversy and adversity, yet she maintains that an approach like Bushnell’s, combining a view of Scripture as authoritative with a woman’s experience, is crucial for the church to move forward.

Overall, this book is worth the time and focus it takes to read, especially as the Myanmar context better represents the present global church than the Western context does.



Kimberly Dickson currently hosts CBE International’s *Mutuality Matters* podcast: Women in Scripture and Christian History and the Global Impact of Egalitarian Theology and Human Flourishing. She is a PhD student in Old Testament and Hebrew Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

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- While the Bible reflects a patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy as God's standard for human relationships.
- Christ's redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
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Need to Know: Empowering Female Leadership and Why It's Essential for the Future of the Church

Danielle Strickland, Mandy Smith, Dr. Mimi Haddad, Scot McKnight, Jo Saxton, Beth Allison Barr, Lisa Rodriguez-Watson, Bob Ekblad, Lori Anne Thompson & Alan Hirsch

The church is grappling with a crisis marked by declining attendance, political polarization, and culture wars. Amidst this crisis is the persistent exclusion of women. How can we truly embody Jesus' vision for the church when we silence and sideline over half the congregation? Even when women are permitted to lead, they are frequently overlooked and left out of decision-making. The result? A depleted church with women leaving in droves.

Need to Know draws on the perspectives of twenty-one authors—a diverse company of predominantly female voices who impart personal experience, theological analysis, and historical study. They challenge the prevailing structures, examine the benefits of empowering leadership, and envision a future where women and men lead together. This book is an essential resource for every church leader to create a more equitable and thriving church.