

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Review of Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_brt.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_brt.php)

## A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Daniel G. Lundy

The role of women has undergone dramatic change in western society in recent years. This change has not bypassed the church. Indeed, some of the most dramatic changes of all have occurred in the church, which until recent decades upheld virtually without exception the principle of male headship in the home and in the church. To say this principle is now beleaguered is an understatement. In some quarters, male headship has vanished; in other quarters, it is on the verge of passing from the ecclesiastical landscape. Even where it is upheld, it is on the defensive, simply by virtue of being a minority position (speaking solely in numerical terms). Those who defend male headship, even in a carefully researched and scholarly way,<sup>1</sup> can expect a certain amount of scorn from fellow scholars.<sup>2</sup>

This debate over the role of women continues to preoccupy the evangelical community, to judge from the 1987 Danvers Statement<sup>3</sup> and the formation of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and the biblical feminist counter-reaction in the form of the statement "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" issued in July 1989 by the group Christians for Biblical Equality.<sup>4</sup> Harvie Conn,<sup>5</sup> among others,<sup>6</sup> has documented the polarization that exists in evangelical circles on the role of women. It does not appear that such polarization (with its accompanying tension) will soon disappear from the evangelical scene.

How, then, should one approach such a controversial issue? Conn proposes as a starting point for both sides in the debate "a fundamental affirmation, a basic biblical touchstone around which all biblical pericopes orbit. The touchstone? Christ has come not to put women down but to lift them up."<sup>7</sup> It cannot be denied that this theme is indeed affirmed throughout Scripture. However, not all would agree that Conn's touchstone is the best way to summarize the central teaching of the Bible concerning women. Stephen Clark, for example, seems to find a different touchstone: the social patterns God laid down at creation for the community of God's people.<sup>8</sup> Some conservative evangelicals who may feel uneasy at the Roman Catholic background of Clark may also feel some misgivings at Conn's approach, fearing that his touchstone (Christ affirms women) may be too supportive of the concerns of biblical feminists.

### *1. The Hermeneutical Issues*

Selecting any one touchstone, in fact, raises the question of whether, and to what extent, one's viewpoint is governed primarily by personal bias. In this regard, Conn's review article is helpful, in that he draws attention to a number of hermeneutical concerns which impinge on the women's issue. His questions (often probing)<sup>9</sup> serve as a reminder that the women's issue is far broader in scope than the question of whether or not women should be ordained. Any discussion of the women's issue inevitably entails reflection on how we approach Scripture. In other words, the women's issue is in many ways a debate about hermeneutics.<sup>10</sup>

As a starting point, whether we approach Scripture from a traditionalist or feminist stance, we must be aware that our exegesis is to some extent influenced by basic convictions we hold. This explains why different readers can draw different conclusions from the same text. As Tremper Longman remarks, "Scholars...are increasingly recognizing the role of the reader in interpretation."<sup>11</sup> No one approaches the Scriptures from a totally objective or neutral point of view. This is why it is so necessary to listen to what others have to say, since their viewpoints probably will include insights lacking in our own. In this sense, Longman sees some value in feminist exegesis, in that it may highlight aspects of the biblical text that would perhaps be passed over by the traditionalists.<sup>12</sup> However, as D.A. Carson warns, simply being aware of bias as we read Scripture does not in itself solve the exegetical problems posed by the biblical texts about women. The fact remains that at numerous points, feminist exegesis reaches conclusions markedly different from traditionalist exegesis.

When books and articles offer "a feminist reading" or "a black reading" or "an African reading" or "a liberation theology reading" of this or that text, there can be no initial, principial objection; for, after all, some of us are busy giving *unwitting* White, Black, Protestant, Reformed or Arminian, conservative or nonconservative readings. If the readings from a different perspective challenge us to come to grips with our own biases, if they call in question the depth of our own commitment to distanciation [standing back from the text as objectively as possible, by recognizing the original setting and intent of the author, as distinguished from the twentieth-century context in which we read the Bible today] and thereby teach us humility, they perform an invaluable service. But it cannot follow that every reading is equally valuable or valid, for some of the interpretations are mutually exclusive. The tragedy is that many modern "readings" of Scripture go beyond inadvertent bias to a self-conscious adoption of a grid fundamentally at odds with the text.<sup>13</sup>

In order to understand biblical passages about women, then, we must combine awareness of our own bias or preunderstanding with openness to be challenged in our preunderstanding by what the text says. In the final analysis, whatever bias we bring to the text must be corrected by the text.<sup>14</sup>

Before turning to the biblical text, however, the terms 'biblical feminist' and 'traditionalist' need to be more clearly defined. *Webster's Dictionary* defines a feminist as someone who advocates equality of the sexes. A more precise definition is obviously in order, since some traditionalists see themselves as upholding equal spiritual status for men and women while insisting on certain role differences based on gender.<sup>15</sup>

At this point, it may be helpful to compare two statements recently issued by evangelical groups occupying opposite positions on the women's issue. The document "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" was published in July, 1989 by the group Christians for Biblical Equality (C.B.E.), which included several well-known evangelical theologians. This document stated: "The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and Redemption." Both men and women, according to the C.B.E. statement, are "divinely gifted and empowered to minister." The statement also claims that the Bible teaches that "women as well as men [may] exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions" of the church. Regarding marriage, the statement endorses a pattern of "mutual submission and responsibility," with the headship of the husband being understood not as authority over his wife but instead as "self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission."

The theological basis for the C.B.E. statement is made explicit through specific comments and specific biblical references given in the statement. The rulership demonstrated by Adam over Eve is said to be a result of the Fall and not part of the original created order; Gen 3:16 is the only proof-text given. The texts that appear to limit the scope of the use of spiritual gifts by women in the church (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15) are said to be "isolated" and in need of being interpreted in the light of passages like Acts 2:17-18, 1 Pet 2:9-10, and Rev 1:6, which (according to the statement) affirm that "women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions" in the church. As for mutual submission in marriage, the statement adduces 1 Cor 7:3-5 as well as Eph 5:21 and 1 Pet 3:1-7 as evidence. The reference in Gen 2:18 to woman as a "helper" is interpreted as devoid of any possible connotations of subordination, in light of the fact that most Old Testament occurrences of this word refer to God as the "helper" of His people. Finally, leadership is seen not as the exercise of power over others, but as "the empowerment of others to serve," with Mk 10:42-45, Jn 13:13-17, and 1 Pet 5:2-3 serving duty as proof-texts.

On the basis of the C.B.E. statement, then, it would be accurate to define a "biblical feminist" as one who believes that the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women without role distinctions based on gender. Indeed, the statement "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" concludes with these words: "We believe that biblical equality as reflected in this document is true to Scripture." As Conn points out in his review article,<sup>16</sup> a good number of biblical feminists so defined would also qualify for the label of "conservative evangelicals" because of their commitment to the inspiration

and authority of Scripture. This is not to deny that there is a range of theological positions within C.B.E. (as within the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood),<sup>17</sup> but rather to point out clearly that many biblical feminists hold a high view of Scripture as the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

For the purpose of this paper, then, the term “biblical feminist” will refer to the position outlined in the C.B.E. statement “Men, Women and Biblical Equality,” namely, that any role distinctions based on gender are inconsistent with biblical teaching on the full equality of the sexes in Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The definition of “traditionalist” also admits of a variety of options, but the essential distinguishing feature of this position is that full equality of men and women in Christ is seen to be compatible with role distinctions based on gender. As the Danvers Statement says in its first two affirmations: “Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart.” Thus, in the traditionalist position as outlined by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, equality of status before God coexists with certain role distinctions. In the home, husbands are called to “humble, loving leadership;” in the church, “some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.” The C.B.M.W. statement does recognize that in a fallen world there is a tendency for men to abuse their position of headship in an uncaring, selfish and arrogant manner, but that statement firmly rejects the notion that male headship is a result of the Fall, maintaining instead (Affirmation 3): “Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin.” No biblical references are given for this (or any other) assertion in the Danvers Statement, which tends to weaken the overall impact of its argument.

It is evident, then, that one major difference between the C.B.E. and C.B.M.W. documents is their understanding of headship. Biblical feminists see headship as a result of sin, whereas traditionalists see headship as an order established by God at creation. This is obviously a crucial distinction between the two sides. If headship is indeed something that comes into existence only after the Fall, then the biblical feminists are greatly strengthened in their argument that one effect of Christ’s coming is to abolish role differences that were implemented as a result of human sinfulness. In a word, headship, for the biblical feminists, is sinful; it is not a part of God’s original design for relationships between men and women.

On the other hand, if the traditionalists are right, and headship was indeed part of the original order between the sexes established by God at creation, then this would strengthen the traditionalist contention that role differences are not intrinsically sinful or demeaning (or possibly not even incompatible with unity of the sexes). Part of the exegetical task facing participants in the debate is to determine whether the Old and New Testa-

ment Scriptures portray headship as a pre-Fall or a post-Fall phenomenon.

In this paper, then, the term “traditionalist” will refer to the view espoused by the Danvers Statement, namely, that full equality between men and women can coexist with role distinctions based on gender. An essential corollary of this position is that Christ’s coming does not abolish male headship, since male headship was part of the pattern established by God at creation.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, biblical feminists find continuity between Creation and Redemption to consist of full equality without role distinctions, whereas traditionalists find continuity in a pre-Fall pattern of equality with role differences which is continued in the New Covenant.<sup>20</sup>

As we begin our consideration of specific biblical texts with these two positions defined, a description by Vern Poythress of what happens in theological argument between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists seems particularly appropriate for the women’s issue.

People disagree over exegesis (the meaning one assigns to a particular passage); yet exegesis is not enough. The essence of the difference is over hermeneutics (general principles for interpreting the Bible). Dialogue will not get far unless it confronts the hermeneutical issues directly.<sup>21</sup>

How well these remarks characterize the debate over the women’s issue! For example, one reads in a traditionalist review of a biblical feminist essay the following words: “I cannot say exactly how the author came to possess the views of male and female leadership in the church that she has. I certainly do not think they came from the Bible in any standard version I read.”<sup>22</sup> It is plain from remarks such as this that disagreement over the role of women involves more than just the meaning of one or two words in a few isolated verses. The depth of disagreement evident in the debate indicates how difficult dialogue is, even when the discussion is restricted to exegesis.<sup>23</sup>

Where there is a common commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture (as appears to be the case with both sides in the evangelical debate over the role of women),<sup>24</sup> it should be possible to arrive at a basic hermeneutical framework for studying what Scripture has to say. The general hermeneutical guidelines proposed by Poythress for the dispensationalist-nondispensationalist debate could serve as guidelines for the women’s debate as well, because they represent widely held evangelical principles of interpretation which do not commit the exegete in advance to either a traditionalist or a biblical feminist interpretation of specific passages.

Here then are Poythress’ suggested “neutral” hermeneutical guidelines for approaching Scripture when engaged in theological debate.

1. We use grammatical-historical interpretation. That is, we ask what

the passage meant in the historical and linguistic situation in which it was originally recorded.

2. We use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Clear passages can sometimes help us with more obscure ones...

3. Main points are clearer than details. We can be sure of the main points even at times when we are not confident that we have pinned down all the details. Things that the Bible teaches in many places or with great emphasis are held with greater confidence than things taught once or in passing (because we are not so sure that we have understood the details correctly).<sup>25</sup>

For the remainder of this paper, these guidelines will inform us as we sketch out an exegetical framework for discussing the women's issue.

## **2. *Genesis 1 and 2***

We begin with Gen 1 and 2 because these two chapters are so important in this debate. First, these two chapters present us with a picture of the male-female relationship unspoiled by sin. It seems clear, then, that this very fact of the complete absence of sin gives special importance to Gen 1 and 2 as indicating, in a foundational way, how God wants man and woman to relate to each other.

There is a second reason for considering Gen 1 and 2 to be crucial texts, and it is obvious to anyone who reads New Testament passages which discuss male-female roles. Both Jesus and Paul refer back to these two chapters of Scripture. Indeed, as we shall see, the very way Jesus and Paul refer back to Gen 1 and 2 show these two chapters possess a continuing relevance and normativity for today. Jesus quotes from Gen 1 and 2 in Matt 19:4-5. Paul's use of Genesis 1 and 2 is a little more extensive. He refers to these two chapters in three places: 1 Cor 11:8-9, Eph 5:31, and 1 Tim 2:13. But before we look at the New Testament use of Gen 1 and 2, let us briefly consider what these two chapters say in general terms.

Gen 1 presents a sweeping, wide-angle view of the whole world which builds up to the climax of verses 26-28, where the creation of the human race is described. Gen 2, on the other hand, zooms in to focus on one aspect of creation, namely, man. The dominant theme of chapter 2 is not the whole of creation but rather one specific part of the whole. Given these different narrative purposes, then, it would not be surprising if the opening two chapters of Gen were to highlight different facets of what it means to be human, facets which would correspond to the two different vantage points.

It appears that this is the case. Gen 1 presents us with the place of the human race within the whole of creation. It is a position of unique honour, for of all that God creates in Gen 1, only mankind is made in God's image. This sets the human race apart from the rest of the created world. To be human thus entails a special status which God has not given, for example,

to the plant or animal kingdoms.

What is particularly significant for the women's issue is the fact that in Gen 1 the female gender is fully and explicitly included in this special status. Verse 27 says that man *and woman* are made in the image of God. In verses 26-28, God gives to the man *and to the woman* a mandate to rule over the earth and sea and air. In other words, the full equality and dignity of woman is clearly and explicitly affirmed in Gen 1. Or to put it another way, we could say that men and women share a common status of special privilege and responsibility in the world which God has made and in which He has placed mankind. What cannot be denied is that, according to Gen 1, women are full and equal partners with men before God.

The picture that emerges from a study of Gen 2 is somewhat different. The focus is on the man. His creation by God is described (verse 7), as well as the physical setting in which God places him (verses 8-14). The moral boundaries of his existence are laid down (verses 16-17). Then comes the statement by God in verse 18, "It is not good for the man to be alone: I will make a helper suitable for him." In what follows, the inadequacy of the animal kingdom to provide a suitable helper for the man is strikingly portrayed (verses 19-20). Then comes the climax of the narrative in verses 21-23. From one of the man's ribs, God makes a woman, and then presents her to the man. His delighted response (verse 23) indicates his satisfaction that a suitable helper has finally been found.

As even a brief summary of Gen 2 shows, the narrative revolves around the man. Unlike Gen 1, where the man and the woman *together* receive a special status as image-bearers of God (1:27: "male and female he created *them*") and a unique responsibility to rule over the world (1:28: "God blessed *them* and said to *them*"), in Gen 2 it is primarily the man who is centre stage. It is his physical environment which is described. It is his rulership over nature which is demonstrated by his naming of the animals (just as, in Gen 1, God demonstrates His mastery over the created order by naming day and night and sky and land). And it is also the man's need for a suitable helper which leads God to create a woman. This last point is clearly stated in verse 18. Man's need for a suitable helper is the express reason for the creation of the woman. Her existence is oriented to his need.

To say that woman was made for man, however, is not to deny that in Gen 2 the narrative also draws attention to the unity of the sexes. In the words of verse 23 ("This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") the man eloquently bears witness to a deep sense that he shares a fundamental sameness with the woman, a sameness moreover that is shared with no other part of the created world. Even the name he gives her (חַוָּה) is at root his own name (אָדָם). So even with the different vantage point of the narrative in Gen 2, there is still a pervasive sense of the profound unity of the sexes which characterizes the narrative found in Gen 1.

We may sum up this overview of Gen 1 and 2 by saying that, generally speaking, the emphasis in Gen 1 is on the unity of the sexes, while in Gen



2 the accent falls more on their differences. Beyond this general picture of unity with differences it does not seem possible to go, at least if we limit our observations to what may be plainly seen on the surface of the biblical text in Gen 1 and 2. It would seem, therefore, that one important aspect of the exegetical task facing both traditionalists and biblical feminists is to consider how the two-fold theme of unity with differences is treated in the New Testament, and in particular, whether this two-fold theme undergoes any transformation in light of Christ coming to fulfill the Old Testament.

Another exegetical task facing both sides in the debate is how to interpret Gen 3:16, where God pronounces judgement on the woman in these words: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." We have already seen that the C.B.E. statement refers to this passage in support of the view that the rulership of Adam over Eve was the result of the Fall. If this understanding of Gen 3:16 is correct, and male headship is inaugurated only *after* the Fall, then male headship would appear to be a negative result of human sinfulness, and as such, presumably would qualify as an effect of the Fall from which Christ redeems us.

The fact that the statement "he will rule over you" is found in the context of God's judgment on sin would appear at first to favour the interpretation advanced by the C.B.E. statement, namely, that the rulership of the man over the woman is part of the curse pronounced by God. But Susan Foh<sup>26</sup> and others<sup>27</sup> have raised some questions about Gen 3:16 which cast doubt on the necessity of interpreting this text as a negative reference to male headship. In particular, do the words "he will rule over you" necessarily imply a *new* dynamic to the male-female relationship which was absent from the pre-Fall relationship? Could these words possibly point to the *corruption* of a previously existing situation in which male headship operated in a *non-oppressive* manner?

One factor which influences the interpretation of Gen 3:16 is its virtual absence from New Testament passages about the role of women. As we shall see, it is not the Fall which Paul emphasizes in his discussions about the role of women, but rather the purposes of God in Creation. This pre-Fall pattern is decisive for his understanding of the propriety of female leadership in the church. Since Paul seems to find male headship of some kind operating in the pre-Fall world described in Gen 2, this would appear to preclude interpreting Gen 3:16 as the *inauguration* of male headship.

What seems to fit the context better is to see God's words to the woman as introducing a negative aspect that had not manifested itself before in the man-woman relationship. Previously, their differences had not led to a competition for ascendancy. Now, there would be a power struggle. To see God's words to the woman as the introduction of negative aspects to an already existing situation would also fit the pattern of God's words to the man, where an already existing mandate to work the land is marred by the introduction of unpleasant hindrances to this work. In other words, to conclude that Gen 3:16 signals a negative situation for the woman would

appear to be a legitimate conclusion, as long as it is recognized that the New Testament points to a pre-Fall setting for the inauguration of male headship.

### **3. Jesus' Use of Genesis 1 and 2**

We begin our look at the New Testament use of Gen 1 and 2 by considering what Jesus says in Matt 19:4-5, where He discusses marriage and divorce. It should be recognized at the outset that the context of Jesus' remarks in Matt 19 about male-female relationships is marriage and divorce, not the context of the modern debate over "the women's issue." Any application of Matt 19 to the modern debate must therefore be indirect. Even with this caveat in mind, there do appear to be some implications for the women's issue to be drawn from Matt 19:4-5.

By quoting from both Gen 1 and Gen 2, Jesus shows in an unmistakable way that the marriage pattern God established at creation (*i.e.*, before sin entered the world) is to continue unchanged as God's will for the human race. This is an important fact to grasp, for whatever newness is involved in the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus, that newness does *not* involve setting aside the first two chapters of Scripture. Gen 1 and 2 still apply to God's New Covenant people as an expression of His will for their lives.

What is striking about the way Jesus upholds Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24 is that this creation pattern stands in contrast to other changes which His coming evidently does introduce. For example, in verse 11 of Matt 19 Jesus says that some of His followers will voluntarily abstain from marriage in order to consecrate themselves entirely to the work of His Kingdom.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Jesus states in verse 9 that marriage between two of His followers can be ended without sin only if one of the marriage partners has broken the one-flesh marriage covenant by unlawful sexual intercourse with a third party.<sup>29</sup> That this represents a "higher" (*i.e.*, with respect to divorce, stricter) view of marriage seems evident from the astonished reaction of the disciples in verse 10. In other words, the coming of Jesus in the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption does entail some new departures for the people of God. His coming, however, does not mean departing from the creation pattern for male-female relationships in marriage which we find in Gen 1 and 2. What God establishes for the human race at creation is carried over into the New Creation.

This is not to say that Jesus, by quoting Gen 2:24 as a valid expression of God's continuing purposes for His people in the New Covenant, understands Gen 2 (where male-female differences are highlighted) in a way which sees women in a subordinate position to their husbands. In fact, Jesus has nothing to say directly one way or the other on the issue of the subordination of wives to husbands. The Gospels do not record any sayings of Jesus which pronounce on that particular issue. In sum, the most that can be said from Matt 19 in relation to the women's issue is that Jesus clearly upholds the continuing validity of Gen 1 and 2.

#### 4. Paul's Use of Genesis 1 and 2

It is surely a significant fact that the apostle Paul, when giving guidelines to churches regarding the participation of women in worship, refers to Gen 2 (1 Cor 11:8-9; 1 Tim 2:12). Like his Lord, Paul sees Gen 2 as a relevant text for the church. Given the appeal made by both Jesus and Paul to these first two chapters of Scripture as authoritative instruction for God's New Covenant people, it would appear that any discussion of the women's issue which downplays the continued relevance of Gen 1 and 2 should be regarded as suspect, in that it treats as of minor (or even no) importance a part of Scripture which Jesus and His chief apostle obviously intend the New Testament church to take quite seriously.

We need at this point to consider more closely the way in which Paul uses Gen 1 and 2. We have already seen that Jesus did not, by His upholding of Gen 1 and 2, endorse a specific (*i.e.*, subordinate) role for women in marriage, since the subject matter at issue was divorce, not the role of women in a broader sense. Paul, however, is concerned with the broader issue of the role of women in the life of the church. His use of Gen 2 (he does not refer explicitly to Genesis 1) is different. From Gen 2, Paul establishes a subordinate role for women in the church.

First, in 1 Tim 2:12 Paul refers to the fact that man was created before woman. This is the sequence we find in Gen 2. What concerns us is the reason for Paul's reference to this sequence. From the immediately preceding verses (11-12), it would appear that Paul is following a familiar enough pattern in the early church preaching and teaching found in the pages of the New Testament. He makes a point, then appeals to Scripture as proof of what he says. Verses 11-12 contain the point he is making ("A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent"); verses 13-14 contain Paul's appeal to Scripture to establish his point ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner"). Paul, then is using Gen 2 (the fact that woman was created after man) to establish a subordinate position for women in the church. In Paul's mind, for women to teach men or have authority over men would constitute a reversal of an order established by God at creation. In other words, the order in which man and woman were created indicates an order in which leadership and submission operate in non-reversible ways. It is proper for men to lead women and for women to submit to their leadership; it is not proper for women to lead and for men to submit to their leadership.

Now it cannot be denied for a moment that what Paul "proves" from Gen 2 (a subordinate position for women in the church) is not explicitly present in Gen 2, if, that is, we consider Gen 2 in isolation from the rest of Scripture. What *is* found in Gen 2, as we have seen, is a focus on the man. The text of

Gen 2 is mainly concerned with the man's need for a suitable helper, and the Lord's provision for his need. We could also say that Gen 2 draws attention to the differences between man and woman in a non-reversible way, in that woman is created for the man, not man for the woman. Clearly it is this very fact that is the foundation for Paul's position. In 1 Tim, Paul sees a subordinate role for women in the church as a consequence of the temporal order in which man and woman were originally created.

Paul puts Gen 2 to similar use in 1 Cor 11:8-9, where he appears to be arguing for some kind of visible distinction between men and women in worship situations. Whatever the details (and there is very little scholarly agreement on them), Paul's argument does stress that there should be among believers outward differences which reflect their respective positions in a hierarchy of headship. He draws attention to that hierarchy in verse 3: "I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

It is important to realize that the form in which Paul presents this hierarchy of headship implies certain parameters for understanding headship. By including the statement "the head of Christ is God," Paul shows that the headship of the man over the woman is analogous to the headship of God over Christ. Unless we are prepared to ascribe ontological inferiority to Christ with respect to His relationship to His head (God), the analogous hierarchy of headship between man and woman must be understood in a way which precludes any ontological inferiority for the woman. In verse 3, Christ is to God what woman is to man. Both have a subordinate position in a hierarchy, but in neither case is any inferiority implied.

Paul's position, then, is that a hierarchy of equals exists between man and woman similar to the hierarchy of equals that exists between the Father and the Son. The order in which man and woman were created points to that hierarchy. Paul explicitly refers to that order of creation in 1 Cor 11:8-9, where he states: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." Here Paul adduces two reasons for a subordinate position for women in the church. First, man was created before woman. As we saw in 1 Tim 2:11-13, temporal sequence indicates to Paul hierarchical position between the sexes. Second, woman was made for man. This fact is for Paul further evidence of the inappropriateness of a woman assuming a dominant position in the male-female relationship, since that dominant position was indicated by God when He created man first.

There is another place where Paul seems to allude to this creation pattern. In 1 Cor 14:33-35, Paul declares: "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." Paul's appeal to Scripture is general; no specific verse is cited. As we shall see later, this has been taken

by some as proof that Paul is referring not to the Old Testament but to extra-biblical (*i.e.*, to rabbinic) sources. Our position (which is argued in my study guide, *The Role of Women in the Bible and Today*) is that this is indeed a reference, albeit indirect, to the Old Testament Scriptures. Such an appeal to Scripture would fit in with Paul's general approach (observable in 1 Cor 11 and 1 Tim 2) when discussing the role of women in the church. Invariably in such discussions Paul refers to the Scriptures in support of his position. Given the citation of Gen 2 made a few chapters earlier (in 1 Cor 11:8-9) to support essentially the same point he makes in chapter 14, namely, that women are not to say or do anything that signals lack of submission, it seems reasonable to understand νόμος in verse 34 as a general reference to the Old Testament.

Paul also quotes from Gen 2 in Eph 5:31. Here his reason for referring to Gen 2:24 is not to show that women are subordinate to men, but to remind his readers that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. What is noteworthy about this passage is that the roles of husband and wife are presented in non-reversible ways, simply by virtue of their respective roles. The husband "plays the part" of Christ (verses 24-25); the wife "plays the part" of the church (verses 22-24). As verse 24 makes clear, the "role" assigned to the wife involves submission, in the same way that submission to the Lord is required of the church. That the roles cannot be reversed follows from the overall nature of the analogy presented. The church, by definition, is subordinate to the Lord who saved her. The Lord, by definition, rules over His people as King. No doubt (as the Old Testament shows) there is a great deal of love in this relationship. Indeed, Paul makes precisely that point in verse 25. The man, who portrays Christ, is called to love his wife in the same way that Christ loved the church, *i.e.*, with a self-giving, self-sacrificing love which puts her needs first. In this way, the man will play his part well. A lack of such love for his wife will distort (perhaps even nullify, where such love is totally absent) the truth of Christ's love for the church that the man's attitude toward his wife is intended to show. And in similar fashion, the wife's submission to her husband is intended to demonstrate the church's glad submission to the One who saved her and now cares for her. But these roles (loving leadership by the man, and glad submission by the woman) are not reversible, because the relationship between Christ and His church is not reversible. We can say, then, that although in Eph 5 Paul does not refer to Gen 2 in order to support the subordination of women, it is clear that on other grounds (namely, marriage as a picture of Christ and His church), the subordinate role which Paul sees for women as a result of Gen 2 is strengthened.

In all fairness to Paul, however, and in the interest simply of accuracy, it must be said that to stop at these comments noted above would give a distorted picture of Paul's view of the role of women in the church. There are a number of statements where Paul is discussing the role of women which strongly suggest that he was well aware of the possibility that his directives

might be misunderstood and consequently misapplied by the believers to whom he wrote. These statements indicate that to Paul, whatever role distinctions existed between men and women, there was nevertheless a deep underlying unity between the sexes in regard to their relationships together in the home and in the church.

For example, Paul's directives to the church in Corinth in 1 Cor 14:33-35 regarding the silence of women in worship services must be set alongside his comments in 11:5, where he says, "Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head." This remark strongly implies that when Paul restricts women from speaking (in 14:33-35), he does not intend the Corinthians to understand this restriction in an absolute sense. (That Paul completely forgets his earlier statement in 11:5 by the time he writes 14:33-35 is so unlikely that it does not warrant serious consideration, especially when there are more plausible interpretations which fit the overall approach which Paul takes to the role of women in the public assemblies of the church.)

Paul, then, expected women to pray and prophesy in church along with the men. Furthermore, his discussion in 1 Cor 11 of the need for visible expressions of male-female differences while the church was gathered for worship shows a recognition of the interdependence of men and women, for he says, in verses 11-12: "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God." This brief statement appears to serve much the same purpose as the comment Paul makes earlier in chapter 3, verses 5-7. There Paul deals with the divisions in the Corinthian church. His method in dealing with that particular problem is to point them away from any human agent in church growth to the ultimate Author of new life, God Himself. Paul is able to undercut the Corinthians' pride in particular people who ministered to them by contrasting the insignificance of all people compared to God, when he says (1 Cor 3:7): "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow." Pride in people or position is excluded when we stand before God, who alone deserves praise.

Paul seems to be making a similar contrast in chapter 11. In form, the passage in chapter 11 resembles the one in chapter 3 in that people are contrasted with God in such a way as to highlight the supreme importance of God. Like the passage in chapter 3, verses 11-12 in chapter 11 end with a statement pointing final attention to God: "But everything comes from God."

If this common pattern is intentional on Paul's part, his comments in chapter 11:11-12 show that he was aware that pride in their position of headship was a danger for men. His comments are not therefore an indication of back-tracking, or waffling on the women's issue, or indecision, or tension between unity in Christ (see Gal 3:28) and role distinctions. Paul the theologian is also Paul the pastor. He knows how rife the problem of

pride is in the church at Corinth, and he wants to undercut that pride (as he did in chapter 3) by reminding both sexes of their mutual dependence on each other and their joint dependence on the Lord. Paul knows that to draw attention to the subordinate role of women could give the false impression that women were in some way inferior to men. Verses 11-12 obviate that possibility, and bear powerful witness to his awareness of the deep unity of the sexes underlying any role distinction.

### ***5. The Two-Fold Pattern***

To sum up, we began our discussion by recognizing the hermeneutical complexity (often unrecognized) of the women's issue. Merely trading "proof texts" back and forth between the opposing sides will not advance the debate, not because "proof texts" do not serve a useful purpose in theological discussion—they do<sup>30</sup>—but because our approach to specific texts at the heart of the women's issue is often influenced by preunderstandings or biases which operate unawares. We attempted to lessen the impact of either traditionalist or feminist biases by approaching Scripture from a more objective stance, using the hermeneutical guidelines suggested by Poythress for theological debate. What we saw, when we approached Gen 1 and 2 this way, was a two-fold pattern of sameness with differences (or unity with distinctions) governing the man-woman relationship. We also saw that for Jesus and Paul, this pattern of unity with distinctions was considered to be normative for the New Covenant people of God. Jesus reaffirms this pattern in an indirect manner, by explicitly upholding the first two chapters of Scripture as the expression of God's continuing pattern for marriage in the New Covenant community of believers. This pattern of unity between the sexes (the dominant emphasis of Gen 1) with some distinctions (the overall emphasis of Gen 2) can be seen in Paul's comments regarding the role of women in worship situations. So far, then, it appears to be a legitimate conclusion to say that a two-fold pattern of underlying unity with some role distinctions operates in both Creation and Redemption. Unity between man and woman was there before the Fall, and unity is there in the New Covenant. Differences were there before the Fall and differences remain in place even under the New Covenant.

This two-fold theme can be found throughout the writings of the New Testament. The Gospels, for example, show us that Jesus dealt with women in a manner which clearly affirms their worth as persons.<sup>31</sup> The spiritual condition of those He meets, not their gender, is what matters most to Him. He not only talks with women about spiritual things and commends them for listening (Luke 10:38-42) but also, as Paul Tournier points out,<sup>32</sup> does so at a deep level which is sometimes noticeably absent in His conversations with men (compare Nicodemus in John 3:1-15 with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26). Women accompany Jesus in His itinerant ministry and provide financial support for Him (Luke 8:1-3). When He dies on the cross, women

are there (Matt. 27:55-56); when He rises triumphant from the grave, women are the first witnesses he commissions (John 20:10-18).<sup>33</sup> By word and deed, Christ affirms women as full partners with men in God's kingdom.

There is, however, one notable exception to this pattern of equality which we see in the life and teaching of Jesus. When it came time to appoint Twelve who would be authoritative leaders in the New Covenant community, Jesus appointed only men. The fact that not a single woman was chosen to give foundational leadership to the church (see Eph 2:20) stands in sharp contrast to the lack of gender distinctions which characterized Jesus' overall approach to women.

To argue at this point that Jesus simply went along with the social conventions of His day so as not to give offense does not solve this apparent contradiction. Rather, it deepens it, for the Jesus who meets us in the Gospels does not shrink from controversy. He had a penchant for pricking pomposity and unmasking hypocrisy, and He never hesitated to deal forcefully with human traditions that stood in the way of God's commands (see Matt 23, Mark 7, Luke 13, and John 8).

It therefore seems ridiculous to claim that Christ breaks with traditional attitudes to women in His life and teaching, yet at this critical point (the appointing of His apostles) goes along with traditional attitudes. Either He was an iconoclast, or He was not. Since the evidence of the gospels is clear that He did break with tradition at many points and did powerfully affirm women as full partners with men in the New Covenant community of faith, the conclusion seems inevitable (unless we argue that Jesus was somehow unable in this instance to transcend the mindset of His day) that Jesus saw no inherent incompatibility between the underlying unity and equality of men and women (which we see in His overall approach to women) and role distinctions based on gender (which we see in His appointing of men only to be apostles).

What we see in Jesus (equality of the sexes with some role distinctions based on gender) is also apparent in the life of the early church. Women are actively involved from the very beginning (Acts 1:14). They prophesy along with men at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 17-18, 21); they believe and are baptized along with men (Acts 5:14; 8:12); they participate in church meetings along with men (Acts 16:13-15; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2). Yet there is a second emphasis. Wives are told to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-7); the participation of women in worship which is presupposed in 1 Cor 11:5 is nevertheless limited in some ways (1 Cor 14:33-34); and women are excluded from the teaching/ruling office of elder or spiritual leader in the congregation (1 Tim 2:12 and 5:17).

In general terms, then, we see that there is a consistent two-fold theme running through the New Testament regarding men and women. There is a deep, underlying unity which coexists with certain role distinctions based on gender. In the words of Francis Schaeffer:



We must affirm two things simultaneously: because men and women are both created in the image of God there is a common equality which has enormous implications for all of life; and because men and women are both created with distinctions as complementary expressions of the image of God, this has enormous implications for all of life—in the family, in the church, and in the society as a whole. And in this wonderful complementarity there is an enormous range of diversity. But at the same time, this is not freedom without form. The Bible gives enormous freedom to men and women, but it is freedom within the bounds of biblical truth and within the bounds of what it means to be complementary expressions of the image of God.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that there are indeed two aspects to consider in the way the Bible speaks about men and women means that both aspects must be affirmed (*i.e.*, unity *and* distinctions) if distortion of the biblical message is not to occur.

---

<sup>1</sup> The massive work *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* by Stephen Clark (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1980), James Hurley's *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), and *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991) are generally considered to be among the ablest defences of the male headship principle.

<sup>2</sup> See the review of Clark's book by Hal Miller, "The Sociology of the Gospel? An Analysis of Stephen B. Clark's book, *Man and Woman in Christ*," *TSF Bulletin* (September/October 1981), 5-8. Miller claims that, notwithstanding the impressive array of citations, Clark is guilty of "a highly selective kind of scholarship...On closer examination, it becomes clear that at point after point he has dealt with his material in a selective and tendentious fashion" [p.6]. Furthermore, Clark has come to the biblical text with a preunderstanding that it supports a patriarchal social code. Claims Miller: "Agreed that one necessarily comes to Scripture with some kind of preunderstanding, this does not mean that such a necessity may be treated as a virtue. Clark has used this necessity to justify fitting the Scriptures on the procrustean bed of an already-known meaning, dictated by his patriarchal preunderstanding" [p.6]. In the end, Miller dismisses Clark's work as one which "must ultimately take its place among the polemic and divisive literature which has polarized and stymied the discussion to now" [p.8]. It is a little hard to understand how a book as bland in style as Clark's book could be categorized as "polemic" and "divisive," unless Miller had his own (one suspects, feminist) axe to grind. Compare the review of Clark's book by Susan Foh in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, 43 (1981), 368-370. Not surprisingly, Foh is appreciative of Clark's work, but that does not stop her from raising some major concerns about Clark's methodology. She

concludes: “*Man and Woman in Christ* contains much helpful material; yet, this reviewer questions the conceptual framework of the book. Is Clark’s definition of social roles derived from the Scriptures or from secular sources?” [p.370].

<sup>3</sup> The Danvers Statement was published (with accompanying information about the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) in *Christianity Today*, 33, No.1 (13 January 1989), 40-41.

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Maudlin, “New Statement Affirms Equality of Men, Women,” *Christianity Today*, 33, No. 11 (18 August 1989), 38. The statement was printed in full in *Christianity Today*, 34, No. 6 (9 April 1990), 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> Harvie M. Conn, “Evangelical Feminism: Some Bibliographical Reflections on the Contemporary State of the Union,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 46 (1984), 104-124.

<sup>6</sup> A helpful summary of the scholarly debate on the women’s issue is provided by D. A. Carson in his *Showing The Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p.121-131.

<sup>7</sup> Conn, “Evangelical Feminism,” p.115.

<sup>8</sup> For Clark, *Man and Woman*, p.212, the community is central: “The New Testament teaching on the roles of men and women is a teaching from relationships in the Christian community.” Clark sees the ordering of role differences within the redeemed community as based on creation: “This order stems from God’s purposes for the human race as expressed in his original creation” [p.211]. It is interesting to note that Clark prefaces his remarks about role differentiation with a statement which shows a good deal of common ground with Conn’s touchstone of the affirmation of women: “The Christian people are called to be the human race living according to God’s original intention. They are able to fulfil that call because they have been restored in Christ to the image of God—corporately and individually. Men and women alike share in this fundamental truth. Men and women alike are fully in Christ, equally forming part of his body. Both are called to fulfil God’s commission for humanity. From this point of view, the fact that men and women are Christians or (redeemed) humans is more important than the fact that they are males and females. Moreover, the daily relating of men and women to one another is not primarily determined by their sex differences. Rather, their relating is determined by their status as brothers and sisters in the Lord who are called to love one another and build one another up in him” [p.210].

<sup>9</sup> For example, regarding creation ordinances, Conn queries (“Evangelical Feminism,” p.122): “Let us grant, as I think we must, their normativity in providing us with guidelines for understanding relationships. But how may we see them without presupposing also that they favor some subordinationist position and were so understood by Paul?...Paul’s concerns for the perceptions of freedom in Christ by ‘those outside’ (1 Cor 11:5, 13-14) makes us ask, ‘Were creation ordinances “the one and only” factor in making Christian decisions regarding women?’”

<sup>10</sup> Conn pursues these hermeneutical concerns relating to the women's issue further in his essay "Normativity, Relevance, and Relativism," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), p.185-209. Conn points to the apostle Paul's sensitivity to cultural particularity in his day as a pattern for evangelicals to follow today. Concerning Paul's reference in 1 Cor 11:14 to "nature" (φύσις) in connection with what is "shameful", Conn comments: "[Paul] seems most naturally to be referring to the general order of human culture and social custom, those cultural values that designate a practice as seemly and becoming, unseemly and unbefitting. And he is arguing for the inappropriateness of a Christian's practice in the light of cultural mores. His goal in this instruction is not the obliteration of cultural perceptions as a hindrance to hermeneutics. It is an understanding of cultural particularities as an aid to the application of the law in our day...Paul's ultimate motivation here and elsewhere is his concern that the church not give unnecessary offense to the world" [p.208]. Conn then applies this general principle to our situation today: "The cultural norms of behavior governing Christian conduct are norms that even unbelievers recognize as worthy of approval. When Christians violate these cultural proprieties, they bring reproach upon the name of Christ and upon their own profession. This does not mean that the unbelieving world prescribes cultural norms of conduct for the Christian in, for example, his or her attitude to women. But it certainly means that the Christian in determining the will of God for here and now must have regard to what can be vindicated as honorable in the forum of men's and women's judgment" [p.208]. Conn, then, sees insights from human culture as aiding the hermeneutical process, with exegesis making the final determination of the meaning of specific texts.

<sup>11</sup>Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p.39. Longman comments: "We must remember that no one can approach the biblical text objectively or with a completely open mind...Everyone comes to the text with questions and an agenda...Evangelical theologians and biblical scholars are becoming increasingly sensitive to the fact that each reader approaches the Scriptures with certain cultural and personal questions and assumptions. We are not neutral and objective as we approach the text. We come at it from different perspectives. This preunderstanding will influence our interpretation of Scripture. The issue is not one of incorrect interpretation but of our giving prominence to certain parts of the text and not to others" [p.39-40].

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p.40: "There are many differences among biblical scholars who operate under the rubric of feminism. Some wish simply to explore the characters, books and themes that are relevant to the situation of the modern woman. Studies of female characters, such as the wives of David, are an example. Others want to read the whole text from a female perspective to see what difference it makes for the implied reader to be a woman. Still others wish to read the Bible as women in order to 'explode the myth of

patriarchy' — that is, to show the innate prejudice of the Scriptures against women and to expose the Bible as a tool of oppression. They are united in the sense that they approach the text with an agenda...While extreme forms of liberation theology and feminism must be rejected and caution must be taken regarding all forms of ideological reading on the grounds that distortion is possible or even likely, much may nevertheless be learned from these perspectives. These [liberationist and feminist] readers bring out themes of Scripture that are commonly passed over by most readers of the Bible — concern for the poor, the role of women, and so forth."

<sup>13</sup>D.A. Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," in his and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p.41-42.

<sup>14</sup>Carson evidently seems to think this corrective function of exegesis has sometimes been overlooked by biblical feminists. He writes: "Some of us who would never dream of formally disentangling some parts of the Bible from the rest and declaring them less authoritative than other parts can by exegetical ingenuity get the Scriptures to say just about whatever we want — and this we thunder to the age as if it were a prophetic word, when it is little more than the message of the age bounced off Holy Scripture...It is seen in its most pathetic garb when considerable exegetical skill goes into proving...that the Bible's use of 'head' in passages dealing with male/female relationships follows allegedly characteristic Greek usage and therefore means 'source' (when close scrutiny of the primary evidence fails to turn up more than a handful of disputable instances of the meaning 'source' in over two thousand occurrences)" ["Recent Developments", p.47]. The "close scrutiny" Carson refers to is the study by Wayne Grudem, "Does *kephale* ('head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," which is included as Appendix 1 in George W. Knight's book *The Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p.49-80. Grudem's methodology and conclusions have been challenged by Richard S. Cervin, "Does [*kephale*] Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal," *Trinity Journal*, 10 (1989), 85-112, without, however, seriously damaging the central thrust of Grudem's thesis that the feminist interpretation of κεφαλή lacks substantial lexical support. Grudem replies to Cervin and other critics in an updated revision of his study of κεφαλή in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p.786-824.

<sup>15</sup>For example, Knight, *Role Relationship*, p.44, argues that just as the submission of the Son to the Father occurs without loss of the Son's ontological status of full deity with the Father, so too the submission of a woman to a man can take place without loss of ontological equality with the man. Writes Knight: "Just as no inferiority may be asserted or assumed for Christ in His submission, so also no inferiority may be asserted or assumed for woman." Knight's point is more fully developed in an article by Robert Letham, "The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 52 (1990), 65-78. Letham contends: "Entailed in the

[feminist] reshaping of the doctrine of man is a departure from the historic Christian doctrine of God...Moreover, since both God and man are to be understood from a perspective forged from feminist concerns, the place where God and man are personally united in the incarnation of the Son will most probably be next on the agenda for change" [p.77].

<sup>16</sup>Conn, "Evangelical Feminism," p.104-105.

<sup>17</sup>Conn's survey of evangelical feminist opinion may be supplemented by Clark's overview, *Man and Woman*, p.226-230.

<sup>18</sup>Books representative of the biblical feminist position include Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1974); Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1975); Virginia Mollenkott, *Women, Men and the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977); Mary Evans, *Woman in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1983); *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1986); and Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not A Woman* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

<sup>19</sup>The traditionalist position is represented on a scholarly level by Clark, *Man and Woman*; Hurley, *Man and Woman*; and H. Wayne House, *The Role of Women in Ministry Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), and *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem. Less technical works include Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1980); Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be A Woman* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1976) and *The Mark of a Man* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1981); Mary Pride, *The Way Home* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1985) and *All The Way Home* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989); Mary Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1990) and *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991); and Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, trans. Gordon Wenham (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> For an interesting one-volume debate between biblical feminists and traditionalists, see Bonnidell and Robert Clouse, eds., *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1989). This volume well illustrates the depth of the disagreement that exists between fellow evangelicals on the women's issue, as well as the deep emotion that is often present when this issue is under discussion.

<sup>21</sup> *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p.45.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Culver, "A Traditionalist Response" in Clouse and Clouse, eds., *Women in Ministry*, p.210. Culver was responding to Alvera Mickelsen's essay in the same volume.

<sup>23</sup> Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, p.52-65, has a very helpful chapter entitled "The Near Impossibility of Simple Refutations," which contains much that is applicable to the women's issue. He shows how difficulties can arise in theological debate when opponents are not suffi-

ciently aware of the fact that different *systems* are opposed. His discussion of the way social forces unconsciously influence beliefs is illuminating, and bears consideration by *both* sides in the women's issue.

<sup>24</sup> Neither the Danvers Statement nor the document "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" has much to say explicitly about the inspiration and authority of Scripture, but it is obvious that both statements are intended to be received as serious attempts to deal faithfully with an authoritative Bible.

<sup>25</sup> *Understanding Dispensationalists*, p.46.

<sup>26</sup> See her essay "A Male Leadership View," in *Women in Ministry*, p.69-105.

<sup>27</sup> For an assessment of alternative interpretations of Gen 3:16, see Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3" in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p.108-109.

<sup>28</sup> The outworking of this exception to the general rule of marriage can be seen in the life of the apostle Paul, who refers to his call to singleness as a "gift" in 1 Cor 7:7-8. Paul's designation of singleness as a "gift," as well as the explanation he gives in the same chapter (verse 26-29, 32-35) should leave no doubt that singleness for the sake of the kingdom is an exception to God's will for most people, namely, marriage. Marriage is still the norm for most believers; singleness is the exception.

<sup>29</sup> See the discussion of divorce in Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) and H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> See John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1987), p.197: "A proof-text is simply a Scripture reference that is intended to show the basis for a particular theological assertion. The danger in proof-texting is well known: proof-texts are sometimes misused and their contextual meaning distorted in an attempt to use them to support teachings they do not really support. But it has never been shown that texts are *always* or *necessarily* misinterpreted when they are used as proofs for doctrines...Any theology that seeks accord with Scripture...has an obligation to show where it gets its scriptural warrant...To forbid theological proof-texts would be to forbid an obviously useful form of theological shorthand."

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Pape, *God's Ideal Woman* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1976), p.46, comments: "No one who is not a woman can appreciate the sense of hope, comfort, understanding and inspiration a woman receives from studying Christ in the Gospels. And for those who were able to meet him on earth the effect must have been doubled. Nowhere does Christ use the words *subordinate* or *subject* in connection with women. He does not compare them on a superior/inferior basis with men." Four decades ago Dorothy Sayers drew attention to the attitude of Christ toward women in her *Unpopular Opinions*, published in 1947 before the modern feminist movement had become a widespread force in society. In *Are*

*Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1971), p.46-47, the reprint of her 1947 essay, she says in typical pungent prose: "God, of course, may have His own opinion [of women], but the Church is reluctant to endorse it. I think I have never heard a sermon preached on the story of Mary and Martha that did not attempt, somehow, somewhere, to explain away its text. Mary's, of course, was the better part—the Lord said so, and we must not precisely contradict Him. But we will be careful not to despise Martha. No doubt, He approved of her too. We could not get on without her, and indeed (having paid lip-service to God's opinion) we must admit that we greatly prefer her. For Martha was doing a really feminine job, whereas Mary was just behaving like any other disciple, male or female: and that is a hard pill to swallow. Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this man...a prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them as 'The women, God help us!' or 'The ladies, God bless them!'; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them...There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity."

<sup>32</sup> In *The Gift of Feeling*, trans. Edwin Hudson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), p.90, Tournier notes: "One cannot read the gospels without being struck by the fact that Jesus was in general better understood by women than by men."

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91: "It was to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus first revealed his resurrection. Nothing shows more clearly the esteem and confidence he had towards women...And it is she whom he charges with the task of announcing the news to the apostles, though he must have known that those would not be disposed to believe women." Tournier adds: "Cast your eye over the whole of history...Jesus' attitude is seen to be absolutely unique. It seems to me that not enough has been made of this obvious fact" [p.92].

<sup>34</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1984), p.135.

*Daniel G. Lundy serves as Registrar, Director of Admissions and Professor of Practical Theology at Central Baptist Seminary in Gormley, Ontario. He holds the Th.M. and D.Min. from Westminster Theological Seminary. He has served pastorates in Ontario and Quebec and is the author of The Role of Women in The Bible and Today: A Study Guide for Contemporary Christians (available from Central Baptist Seminary at \$5.00 per copy). This essay is taken from his D.Min. thesis, "Toward An Authentic Biblical Feminism."*