



A Question Mark Over My Head

The experience of women in the evangelical academy

Also inside...

Evaluating the logic of woman's subordination
Mutual submission in marriage
Paul's neglected treatise on gender

A special edition journal of
Christians for Biblical Equality
cbeinternational.org | 2015

Contents

3 Wholeness in the Family of God *Tim Krueger*

4 “A Question Mark Over My Head”: Experiences of Women ETS Members at the 2014 ETS Annual Meeting *Emily Louise Zimbrick-Rogers*

14 “Equal in Being, Unequal in Role”: Exploring the Logic of Woman’s Subordination (Excerpted from *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed.) *Rebecca Merrill Groothuis*

27 Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage: Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33 (Excerpted from *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed.) *I. Howard Marshall*

34 First Corinthians 7: Paul’s Neglected Treatise on Gender *Ronald W. Pierce*

DISCLAIMER: Final selection of all material published by CBE in *A Question Mark Over My Head* is entirely up to the discretion of the editors, consulting theologians and CBE’s executive. Please know that each author is solely legally responsible for the content and the accuracy of facts, citations, references, and quotations rendered and properly attributed in the article appearing under his or her name. Neither Christians for Biblical Equality, nor the editor, nor the editorial team is responsible or legally liable for any content or any statements made by any author, but the legal responsibility is solely that author’s once an article appears in print in *A Question Mark Over My Head*.

Editor: Tim Krueger

President / Publisher: Mimi Haddad

Board of Reference: Miriam Adeney, Carl E. Armerding, Myron S. Augsburger, Raymond J. Bakke, Anthony Campolo, Lois McKinney Douglas, Gordon D. Fee, Richard Foster, John R. Franke, W. Ward Gasque, J. Lee Grady, Vernon Grounds[†], David Joel Hamilton, Roberta Hestenes, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Donald Joy, Robbie Joy, Craig S. Keener, John R. Kohlenberger III[†], David Mains, Kari Torjesen Malcolm[†], Brenda Salter McNeil, Alvera Mickelsen, Roger Nicole, Virgil Olson[†], LaDonna Osborn, T. L. Osborn[†], John E. Phelan, Kay F. Rader, Paul A. Rader, Ronald J. Sider, Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer, Ruth A. Tucker, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Timothy Weber, Jeanette S. G. Yep

A Question Mark Over My Head is a special edition journal published by Christians for Biblical Equality and distributed at the expense of Christians for Biblical Equality to the mailing list of the Evangelical Theological Society, © 2015.

122 West Franklin Avenue, Suite 218,
Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451, phone:
612-872-6898; fax: 612-872-6891; or email:
cbe@cbeinternational.org. CBE is on the
web at www.cbeinternational.org.

To order additional copies of this journal,
visit cbebookstore.org.

The Greek font in this journal is available
from www.linguistsoftware.com.



NAE | National Association of
Evangelicals

Wholeness in the Family of God

Tim Krueger

I recently read a blog post in a series about one of the fascinations du jour of America's cultural and religious pundits: millennials. Specifically, this series was about why millennials are leaving the church in large numbers. This post in particular was a perhaps-embarrassed confession of the author's discovery that millennials are not leaving the church in droves; *white* millennials are.¹ This realization inspired the author to seek an explanation of why the trend differs along racial lines.

A different question grabbed my attention: How is it that he (and I, and so many other white Christians) were unaware of (or at least unaffected by) this fact? With the touch of a button, I can talk to and learn about Christians all over the world, and yet I am clueless about the lives and faith of my non-white brothers and sisters down the street.

We are the community about whom Paul said "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:12–13). Indeed, Paul spent a good deal of effort exhorting the family of God to unity. He did not condone division and partisanship in the church, yet disunity has become so normal for us that we often have no idea it is happening. We have become insular. Often, we are not concerned with expanding our picture or understanding of the body of Christ, but with defending our own views or communities, thus isolating ourselves. This isolation breeds insensitivity to those who are different from us.

This should not be! Christians should be the first to seek out the voices we usually do not hear, especially those within the body of Christ! Are others rejoicing? Let us rejoice with them! When they suffer, let us suffer with them. Let us, at the very least, hear them. Just as I am one of many white Christians who have lived unaware of and unconcerned with the successes and suffering of my brothers and sisters of color, so I am one of many Christian men who has often failed to hear the voices of the women in my midst.

This year, in keeping with the ETS Annual Meeting's theme of "Marriage and Family," this journal shares the experience of women at ETS, an often-unheard minority in the ETS family. The cover article, "A Question Over My Head': Experiences of Women ETS Members at the 2014 ETS Annual Meeting," shares the findings of a qualitative research study conducted at the 2014 ETS Annual Meeting in San Diego, CA. The study's intent was simple: to better understand the experiences of women at ETS and learn how they can be better supported.

In all, over thirty people were interviewed, mostly women, but also several men, and they ranged from

exhibitors to ETS members to members of ETS's executive committee. The results reveal the often-heartbreaking reality that is the evangelical academy for many women. I pray that as you read the results of the study, you will do so with Paul's words to the Corinthians in mind: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor 12:26). I am hopeful that these accounts will nudge us all to consider what might be done to welcome and value the voices of women in the evangelical academy.

Please add your voice to the conversation, as well. The author, Emily Zimbrick-Rogers, will make a special presentation of her research on Tuesday, November 17, from 7:45–9:15 p.m. in room 301 of the conference venue. Prior to that, you are invited to join CBE for dinner at 5:30 p.m. at the Hard Rock Cafe, just a couple blocks away from the conference hotel.

In addition to Zimbrick-Rogers' research, this journal reprises a few articles that profoundly impact that way we think and act in the family of Christ, whether in our community life or our individual marriages. Rebecca Merrill Groothuis evaluates the logic of women's subordination in her essay "Equal in Being, Unequal in Role," excerpted from the excellent volume, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Also excerpted from that same volume, I. Howard Marshall analyzes Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33 in his article "Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage." Finally, Ron Pierce highlights twelve principles of mutuality in marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, what he calls "Paul's neglected treatise on gender."

I pray that the articles that follow serve not to entrench believers according to their various perspectives, but open up dialogue about how we—both ETS and the Christian community as a whole—can become a family characterized by health, mutual respect, and wholeness.

NOTES

1. Preston Sprinkle, "Why Are White Millennials Leaving White Church in Droves?" *Theology in the Raw*, September 28, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/theologyintheraw/2015/09/why-are-white-millennials-leaving-white-church-in-droves/>.



Tim Krueger studied history and biblical/theological studies at Bethel University (MN). He is CBE's publications and communications manager, and he is also the editor of CBE's magazine, *Mutuality*. He and his wife, Naomi, live in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

“A Question Mark Over My Head”: Experiences of Women ETS Members at the 2014 ETS Annual Meeting¹

Emily Louise Zimbrick-Rogers²

Introduction and Background

Evangelical women face a myriad of messages related to pastoral and teaching roles in the church and academy. Some evangelical churches open their doors to women leaders while others reject the ordination of women and endorse explicitly hierarchical models of gender relations, both in marriage relationships and also in church and church-focused institutional hierarchies.³ Others even extend male authority to secular arenas, excluding women from exercising leadership or authority over men that is direct and/or personal.⁴

Similarly, Christian higher education is a contested space for women. Women make up the majority of Christian college undergraduates, yet comprise between five and seventeen percent of senior leaders in Christian higher education.⁵ Women are thirty-four percent of graduate students at member institutions of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and approximately eighteen percent of full professors at ATS member schools.⁶

The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) is the largest and most prominent evangelical academic society in the field of biblical studies/theology, with a membership of approximately 4,500 members (2,600 full, voting members) and 2014 conference attendance of just over 2,600.⁷ Women make up approximately six percent of ETS membership, with no breakdown distinguishing percentage of full, associate, or student members.⁸ The 2014 annual meeting attendance comprised seven percent women, which included all three levels of membership, exhibitors, and spouses.⁹ The ETS has no official policy on women in teaching or leadership roles, yet no women have ever served on the executive committee since the society’s founding in 1949 and it is unknown when women members joined the society. Additionally there are no women on the journal’s editorial board and few have been in regional leadership positions.¹⁰ However, for the 2015 annual meeting five women are chair or co-chair of a program unit and women are committee members for an additional seven program units (out of fifty-six).¹¹

The 2015 annual meeting will feature a woman plenary speaker, Myrto Theocharous, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Greek Bible College. This will be the first time a woman has been a plenary speaker since 1986, when the topic was “Male and Female in Biblical and Theological Perspective” which included addresses from long-time ETS members Catherine Clark Kroeger and Aída Besançon Spencer.^{12,13}

This article presents some of the findings of a qualitative case study of women academics at the 2014 ETS Annual Meeting. The “Women at ETS” qualitative case study was conducted during MDiv studies by the author, assisted by Jennifer L. Aycock and supervised by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) president and ETS member and ETS Evangelicals and Gender Study Group co-chair Mimi Haddad.^{14,15} The case study did not have any overt policy goals at the beginning of the project other than to gain a better understanding of women who were ETS members. It was our goal to listen to the stories and perspectives of evangelical women academics specifically in the context of ETS, and to gain insights regarding how CBE—and others—

could better support women at ETS. We also invited men to contribute their perspectives on the ETS.

Most participants defined themselves as either “egalitarian” or “complementarian,” although some did not identify with either.¹⁶ While many definitions can be put forward for both “egalitarian” and “complementarian,” and terms such as these often change over time, this article will attempt to use these terms in ways consistent with their gestalt meaning derived from the participants. Egalitarians saw no biblical restrictions on women teaching the Bible or theology to adult men in churches, colleges, and seminaries.¹⁷ Complementarians in this study differed widely on their restrictions for women. Some complementarians supported women teaching Bible and theology in colleges or seminaries, but observed restrictions focused on church preaching positions or pastoral leadership (such as elders). Others believe that women may serve communion, baptize, and be ordained, but should be restricted from preaching or pastoral leadership. Some believed that women may teach a Bible or theology Sunday school class as long as the church leadership (“headship”) remains within the domain of male elders or pastors. Others did not think women should teach a Sunday school class to adult men (but could teach Bible in college or seminary). The four Southern Baptist affiliated participants in this study saw restrictions on women teaching any adult male any amount of Bible or theology, in any setting—the church, colleges, or seminaries. They also restricted women’s leadership/pastoral roles (often using the term “male teacher” to indicate that men alone must teach Bible or theology to men, but women may teach Bible or theology to women).

Background: Evangelicalism, Women, and Social Science

Women in evangelicalism have not attained equal positions of leadership compared to women in similar fields in mainline churches and institutions or secular circles.¹⁸ This is consistent with the experience of women in multiple sectors, both religious and non-religious, which also includes the secular academy.¹⁹ In the present study, I sought to apply a holistic approach to gender and power that recognizes women’s agency as they define their own lives in addition to acknowledging the historical, theological, and cultural marginalization of women.²⁰ This study also draws on social science’s engagement with evangelicalism’s history and culture, and evangelical Christians’ interaction with the non-evangelical world.²¹ While most of these researchers focus on the social construction of evangelicalism, they often evaluate only the practical outcomes of a particular theology instead of seeing theology as the study of God, which leads to religious beliefs and epistemologies.²² Thus, a theological investigation of gender and power within evangelicalism remains a significant oversight in much of the present literature on gender and evangelicalism.²³ The biblical hermeneutics and theology of the participants undergird any discussion of gender, power, and agency. This article hopes to begin to fill in some of the gaps in the literature by first providing a detailed description of participants’ experiences.

A full understanding of the place of women in ETS requires a multi-disciplinary approach. There must be an engagement with theological epistemology and critical social science, situated in social and historical context.²⁴ While it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the nuances of evangelical theology and gender in relationship to the lived experiences of women, it is my goal throughout this study to bring the lived experiences of the research participants into a conversation that often remains at an abstract level of theology and philosophy. It is hoped that listening to the life stories of women will garner insights regarding their relationship to ETS and evangelicalism, in addition to their self-understandings while exploring their subjectivities.²⁵

Methods and Methodology

This qualitative case study was conducted at the ETS annual conference in San Diego, California, Nov. 19–21, 2014, focusing on ethnographic participant-observation and semi-guided²⁶ one-on-one interviews.²⁷ A research assistant, Jennifer L. Aycock, and I conducted narrative based, life-history interviews, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The thirty-five participants²⁸ included exhibitors with bachelor's degrees and full professors with doctoral degrees, ranging from mid-twenties to early seventies. Of the married participants, most had children. Twenty-nine of the participants were women; seven were men. Twenty-one of the participants had earned doctoral degrees, with an additional six who were current PhD students. Two participants were not ETS members but worked in various publishing and exhibit booths. Participants came from all regions of the US and Australia, Canada, China, and Scandinavia. Most participants were white or of European descent with five individuals with Asian, Hispanic/Latin American, or Middle Eastern ancestry. No African Americans were interviewed, reflecting the current lack of African Americans in ETS.²⁹

The most commonly represented institutions at the Annual Meeting 2014 included (in order of number of sessions) were Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), Wheaton College and Graduate School, Talbot School of Theology and Biola University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) and Trinity International University, and Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). About half of the participants were affiliated with these six institutions at the time of the interviews.

Most of the participants described their position as supportive of women teaching Bible and theology and preaching, some self-identifying as egalitarian. Ten participants self-identified as complementarian, and several participants did not identify with any position in their interviews.

The women participants were recruited using standard case study techniques,³⁰ using contact information from CBE and individually emailing women whose names were listed as presenters in the Annual Meeting program book. A number of women then recommended others to contact, which resulted in snowball sampling. A few individuals heard about the project during the conference and specifically sought us out to participate. Six of the male officers of the Society were invited to participate, and three were interviewed. An additional four men were identified through personal contacts and were interviewed; two were former ETS executive committee members and two men had public track records of mentoring women students and working with women colleagues.

Informed consent was obtained, following standard qualitative methodology.³¹ Analysis of the data was conducted in accordance with standard qualitative methodologies.³²

Results

Analysis of the research data revealed three main themes, which the remainder of the article will explore in detail:

- Women's experience of marginalization
- Institutional culture and structural sexism
- The role of men for the future

Women's Experience of Marginalization

Women experienced ETS in multiple different ways. Most experienced the ETS annual meeting as negative, some as a mixture of good and bad, and a few as wholly positive.

Positive Experiences

While only three participants described mainly positive experiences at ETS, it seemed useful to start with their stories. The two most positive descriptions of ETS came from Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) affiliated women. Candi Finch, assistant professor of theology in women's studies at SWBTS, said,

My favorite work event of the year is ETS. I don't feel weird because I'm a woman. To be honest, I teach just women, and in my PhD work and in my classes, I was the only woman. Never was anyone rude or questioned why I was there. I know some people have had that experience, but for me, it's only been great.

Candi described the annual meeting as a way to connect with colleagues and expand her knowledge. She was unsure why more women do not attend: "In my setting, it's only been encouraged. Never have I thought, 'That's not a place for women.'"

Dorothy Kelley Patterson, professor of theology in women's studies at SWBTS and wife of SWBTS president Paige Patterson, described her experience in exclusively positive terms as well:

Well, I've never in all my years at ETS been treated in any way disrespectfully. I should say, I've always had very respectful treatment even when I read papers. . . . Now I will say this, I have been embarrassed to be in the room with some women in [ETS]. I remember a specific one . . . a woman in this conference *disrespectfully*³³ attacked [George Knight] in a very inappropriate way. . . . And she had a degree in New Testament too, but I can absolutely assure you she was no George Knight.

. . . But that's the only bad memory I have related to gender. . . . Now that's not to say there haven't been incidences like that for women presenting papers; I just haven't observed them.

Other women spoke positively, but their stories suggested a low bar for a good experience. For example, Jessica, a doctoral student in her twenties, said she perceived people to be supportive and positive, because "I expect people to not want me there." Cristina Richie, an adjunct professor of health care ethics at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences and a doctoral student at Boston College in theological ethics, described her time as overall positive. She recounted arriving at her first regional ETS meeting (Northeast) with a "combination of righteous anger and ambition

and serving, wanting to change things.” The thirty-three-year-old was surprised to meet a male egalitarian scholar who immediately made her feel welcome. Cristina nominated herself for the regional steering committee and was elected. “At every move it has been pretty easy for me to get in there, as long as I’ve had a certain amount of confidence and being willing to get heard.” She said that even the older “conservative Baptists” have been friendly, sensitive, and respectful.

Negative Experiences

The majority of women described assumptions of both men and women, and how these assumptions can lead to dismissive or even hostile actions. The treatment women experience leaves many women feeling unwanted, invisible, marginalized, or even excluded.

Men’s and Women’s Assumptions

Some of the assumptions women experienced were related to the legitimacy of their experience or their knowledge. Brittany, an exhibitor who works for a conservative publishing company, tried to explain to her male exhibitor colleagues her negative experiences related to gender at ETS: “If I bring them up, they laugh them off or just shrug, thinking I made them up.” Katherine, an egalitarian exhibitor, said, “I don’t have the time and energy to argue with these guys. They don’t really care. They are more interested in destroying my argument than actually engaging in the issue and its consequences.”

Erica, a single professor who is active in other academic societies,³⁴ said ETS “is generally a hostile environment” which she related to the assumptions people make about her.

They have no idea how hurtful it is to make that assumption about me and they don’t even know me. . . . One of the first questions I got for many years coming to ETS, ‘So, where does your husband teach?’ That question has a lot of assumptions. The assumption that I couldn’t come to ETS on my own merits and that I couldn’t be one who teaches, because only a husband teaches. I’ve had it happen many times at ETS if I’m standing with a male, and another group of men comes up and start talking, they assume I am his wife and don’t even bother to find out my name . . . It’s very dismissive.

Sometimes the assumptions dealt with women’s marital status, but many participants also mentioned assumptions about sexual motives or their female embodiment. Sara Kim, a twenty-seven-year-old master’s in spiritual formation student at Talbot and ETS student scholarship recipient, said,

I really feel like a token Asian female here. That was my first feeling of being at ETS. Maybe it’s just me, but I felt like I was getting a lot of looks from older guys that said, ‘Oh, little girl, you’re out of place. What are you doing here?’ . . . I look young. I look very young. I know we Asians look younger than we are. But I’m not just Asian. I’m also a female. They didn’t say these things out loud, of course, but I just felt it, whether or not that’s what these looks said. But this is just how I interpreted these looks.

Louise, a professor, said that men look at her nametag, and they “pretend they don’t see it. It is the weirdest thing. . . . Is it because I’m a woman I’m a temptress on an elevator and you’re here without your wife? Or is it because you don’t want me here?”

Many of the women critiqued themselves or belittled their own experiences, yet attention needs to be paid to internalized scripts and the externalized but potentially unspoken messages that the women experience with regularity.³⁵ Even as women admitted the above internal dialogue, they also did not wonder if they were projecting the correct message. Emma mentioned passing by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) booth and assuming that if the CBMW staff knew she had children at home, “they would immediately say, ‘What are you doing here? You should be at home.’” Emma was confident in what message CBMW projected, even if unconsciously or unintentionally.

Unwelcome or Hostile Actions

The marginalization and exclusion of women might not always occur explicitly, but these participants acutely felt it. The effect is to produce an atmosphere that feels hostile and unwelcoming and to produce uncertainty in women when interacting with men at ETS.

Isabelle, an adjunct professor who is currently working on a doctorate, has decided to focus her presenting at the Institute for Biblical Research (IBR) and the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL). She reiterated that she had received a sustained message of unwelcome:

You’re never sure, should I speak, should I not speak? We have no idea if the guy standing next to us—if we should even bother starting a conversation with him because he may not even think we should be there. . . . Maybe that’s another reason we don’t go to ETS because at SBL we belong. At ETS we don’t always.

Christa McKirland, a ThM student at Talbot in her late twenties, like many women, described positive individual encounters that were colored by a culture of unwelcome.

I’m not asking every man I pass, ‘So do you think I should be here, do I have a right to be here? Do you want to hear my voice?’ . . . But for me, I’m a walking question mark. ‘Where do you stand? Are you an insider, an outsider? Who are you attached to? Why aren’t you attached to somebody?’ . . . I walk around with a question mark over my head. Friend? Enemy? Friend means you submit to this paradigm. Enemy—you question these things and you may not be safe.

However, more than one participant recounted specific stories of hostile actions or rude comments. Brooke, an egalitarian doctoral student, said by the second day of the conference she usually has heard a negative story of prominent complementarians³⁶ doing “a specifically unkind thing to a person in a session,” to either a woman, a man who is an advocate of women, or some other male with what Brooke called “more moderate opinions.”

Feeling Invisible or Unequal

Even if women had not themselves experienced an unkind action, they absorbed a general feeling of being unequal, unnoticed, and even invisible. Karen, a professor and a woman of color, said she too felt like “an anomaly”:

As a woman and a person of color and single, it actually is a very, very difficult and painful place to be in many ways, because it tends to be a replay of being treated as if invisible, because of male privilege compounded by white privilege.

She recounted an informal conversation with a man, in which,

He made a point to say several times he was married. You realize that even just your very appearance makes other people uncomfortable in some way. They may not be aware of it, but they make you aware of it. You realize there are so many barriers there to see you as a peer or colleague or conversation partner. Sexuality intruding—there have been several of those kinds of odd interactions. . . . I can only conclude that men are so unaccustomed to women colleagues. . . . Those kinds of incidents have been very, very painful, because they are telling about how I can be objectified and excluded simply in virtue of who I am, about the hidden but powerful barriers that others put up that militate against professional collegiality and collaboration.

Karen was interested in talking to the man about the session they both attended, but she felt that a host of barriers prevented them from actually communicating, leaving her feeling invisible. Karen was not the only person to refer to both male privilege and white privilege. She and others explained how privilege stems from unconscious power that marginalizes people that do not fit within conventional categories.³⁷

Exclusion Resulting from Being an Outsider

Betsy works for one of the exhibitor companies but would prefer to use her doctorate in a teaching position.³⁸ Her insights illustrate how she experienced outsider status:

When you come in as a woman, you're automatically an outsider because you're not in the majority . . . So I feel like an outsider gender-wise, and also feel because I don't have a job in the academy, haven't been able to get one, feel like an outsider professionally. It's like the club you can't quite get in . . . Couple of layers of being an outsider. . .

. . . In complementarian environments, I tend to feel like I'm a lesser person. . . . And I have a hard time separating what I perceive to be a statement on my value, which I don't think the men would say that it is—they don't perceive it that way—but that's how it feels.

For Betsy, and other participants, their primary experience of ETS was one where they felt their very presence was too *different* and therefore too *difficult* to include.³⁹ She and others often felt like outsiders “intruding into male territory,” in the words of Barbara, who has earned two master's degrees from Liberty University but has continued to work in a secular industry. Additionally, Karen, the professor of color, mentioned several women doctoral students she knows who have come to ETS once and never come again. “They are incredibly gifted, but the demographics and the insider culture [are] so exclusionary.”

Institution and Structure at ETS

It is difficult to separate out the differing negative experiences of women because their quotes illustrate multiple components of their experiences. The women understood these overarching assumptions, experiences of dismissive or hostile actions, marginalization, and exclusion as coming from both individuals and also larger structural forces. The second broad theme emerging from the interviews relates to the concepts of *institution* and *structure* and *institutionalized culture* and how these factored into women's experiences at ETS.

Institutional Male Leadership

Participants commented frequently on the leadership structure at ETS as emblematic of the institutional culture of ETS regarding women.

A number of participants, both women and men, compared ETS leadership to IBR leadership. While women make up eleven percent of IBR members, the IBR leadership is currently twenty-five percent female.⁴⁰ Jane, a professor, felt the “big difference is leadership and public face. . . . ETS is a male public face.” This public face is both symbolic and practical, she and others explained. “If you really want women to feel welcomed, then you need someone who is representing,” said Samantha, a professor. She explained that the public face of an organization models its values, so if the public face is only a male face then women are marginalized.⁴¹

Furthermore, participants mentioned that the male face was usually ideologically aligned with overtly complementarian entities, which will be addressed later in the article. This meant something to the participants. Emma expanded on how she understood the composition of the ETS executive committee, saying that when looking at potential schools for her children, “[My husband and I] would immediately go look at the board. If there were no women, we'd be like, ‘Nope.’ There's a reason they made that decision.” Louise stated the problem succinctly: “I don't know enough about the inner workings of the power structure at ETS . . . All I know is the end result, which is very white and very male.”

Institutional Lack of Women's Voices

Participants also mentioned the lack of women plenary speakers.⁴² Anthea McCall, an ordained Anglican minister and lecturer of New Testament and dean of students at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, said that organizations such as ETS try to keep people happy and if there are women on the platform, then it is assumed some people will not come. She said it goes the other way too: “But I also think, ‘Well, we're not going to have some people come because they never see women on that platform.’ [Some people will say,] ‘This isn't for me.’” Carmen Bryant, a career missionary in her seventies who is an adjunct professor at Multnomah University and the WorldView Center, said people have asked her why she's attended what they call the “good ol' white boys club.” She laughed as she spoke, explaining ETS wasn't unusual compared to her decades of working primarily with men.

Louise talked about the “missing” voices⁴³ of women and people of color. She noted that at a panel discussion on homosexuality all four presenters were middle-aged white men.

The conversation they did have was helpful. But I sat there the whole time thinking, *are you kidding me?* How can you call yourselves *complementarian* where you emphasize the complementary relationship between men and women and then don't act like you believe that? If you really think we're needed, our voices are needed, what are our voices needed for? It must not be theology.

Later in her interview, she explained how she would want us to present these interviews to men at ETS:

If a huge majority of ETS theologians hold to the view that women are *complementary* to men in God's design, then they should be troubled at the prospect of looking at the text

without female eyes. . . . This is the key word. You can't have seven percent women and say [she started chuckling] we believe in the complementary relationship.

Institutional Lack of Women in Leadership

Participants frequently commented on the fact that women had never been in leadership or they did not know if there had ever been a woman in any leadership position.

"Until you allow women, even if they are just seven percent, into leadership, then you are not going to attract people. And I think they just need to care. I don't think they care," said Frances, a professor who recently joined a study group steering committee. Christa McKirland, a ThM student at Talbot, said it would be "powerful" if there were women in leadership. "What we model publically is what we value privately," she said. Brooke, a doctoral student in her twenties, added the significant idea of safety to why women leaders were necessary,

If ETS were committed to improving and increasing female participation, there would be women in leadership and it wouldn't be CBE or an affiliate of CBE that was asking this question. It would be ETS asking. . . . It would demonstrate that ETS has a commitment to female members feeling safe. . . . Until there is a female on the executive committee that's not going to be the case.

It was clear that to women at ETS, having women in leadership is not about political correctness or imitating the secular academy with its emphasis on diversity. Women in leadership—or the lack of women in leadership—sends powerful messages on what is affirmed and allowed.

A counter-narrative on women in leadership was Dorothy Kelley Patterson's. She said she wanted women to come and read papers: "I'd love to come back to where we were in the beginning where the women who attended . . . were really there not so much to push themselves forward as to learn."

Contrary to the concerns of Dorothy Kelley Patterson regarding women pushing themselves forward for leadership roles in ETS, most female participants, when asked if they had ever considered a leadership role in ETS, said no. "It's never entered my mind as a possibility," Susan, a professor in her early sixties, said. Others said they didn't think there would be widespread support for women in leadership, especially egalitarian women. Louise laughed and said, "Why put myself through it?" She explained that she didn't think the general membership would vote for a woman and her sheer presence was already a "big deal." Samantha reframed the question and said that people do not consider leadership roles for themselves but are "chosen." She was not referring to the nominating process but more of a conceptual idea that people in power *allow* and *select* those who are invited to share power and authority. A few participants said they thought a complementarian, not an egalitarian, woman would be the first woman on the executive committee, though no one mentioned a specific one.

Only two or three participants mentioned the possibility of being on the ETS executive committee, though they used the language of "hoped and dreamed" rather than concrete plans or future reality.

The three current executive committee members interviewed (all self-identified complementarians) differed widely on the

explanations of lack of women in leadership. Stuart said the membership of ETS and the executive committee "would be delighted" to have a woman in executive leadership.

I know we're actively seeking women scholars to serve on the executive committee. . . . I could be wrong about this; we may have some old-school folks who wouldn't go for that. But I'm not aware that they're on the current board. . . . Everyone embraces that we're behind [on allowing/promoting women in leadership]. . . . but it is just logistically figuring it out. It shouldn't be that hard. . . . I think the primary issues now are just logistical ones.

DTS Senior Professor of New Testament Dan Wallace is the current president-elect and convened the 2015 Annual Meeting around the theme Marriage and Family. He is uncomfortable with the label complementarian because he has witnessed other complementarians use texts to "subjugate women and treat them as second-class Christians," and said that there was "way too much backroom politicking that's going on that is keeping women from having a place in this society."

On the other hand, SBTS professor Tom Schreiner said he didn't think ETS was making any decisions to prevent women from leadership, but that "ETS is more reflective [of colleges/seminaries/pastorates] than executive in the way it works." Tom said the presence of more Southern Baptists, "given the Southern Baptist view," could lead to the lack of women in leadership as a "practical consequence that is somewhat inevitable." He explained that his "view of women" is that no woman should teach men the Bible or theology at a seminary. He said that most Southern Baptists "would agree that it would be a good thing to have women to be involved in ETS and present papers and so forth. But given our polity and our view of women, it isn't surprising that that number is less." It was unclear if "so forth" includes women in actual leadership.

Institutional Complementarianism

It was evident from the interviews that ETS has a reputation throughout the theological academy for its predominant complementarianism. Emma heard during graduate school that ETS "is a bunch of men who don't like women so you really wouldn't want to go anyway." She didn't go to ETS until colleagues at the evangelical college she now teaches at invited her.

Western Seminary professor of theology Gerry Breshears, the 1993 ETS president who has been a member for forty years and continues to be in leadership as Program Units chair, said that in the 1980s it tended to be egalitarian, but "there was a kickback [toward complementarianism] in the mid-90s and it's still true." Gerry said that there have been both members and leadership who are egalitarian, but the majority of society members and most of the executive committee members have been and are complementarian.⁴⁴

Samantha agreed, suggesting the institutional complementarianism has grown out of and been reinforced by ETS leadership. Recalling the election of a prominent complementarian to leadership in the past, she remarked, "That just sends a message. . . . I would look at who has been president the last fifteen years, and the executive committee the last fifteen years. Right now, that's who controls and sets the environment."

David Howard, a complementarian professor of Old Testament at Bethel Seminary and the 2003 ETS president, explained that the nominating committee process has become “somewhat of a coordinated effort” and “somewhat more politicized.”⁴⁵ Dan Treier, a systematic theology professor at Wheaton who describes himself as egalitarian in some respects and soft complementarian in others, said, “Not only has there been an attempt to keep women off the board, but there has been an attempt to stack the board with complementarian males and to keep egalitarian males out of the picture.” Another male complementarian who has been in leadership explained what he saw at play: “There are very strong complementarian forces that prevent women from getting on the nominating committee. . . . This subculture, this machine, is working at full force. These people want to control it.”

Many participants pointed to the infusion of Southern Baptists⁴⁶ at ETS in recent years as one reason for the concentrated and politicized complementarianism. Louise said, “I sense an increasingly strong, and Southern Baptist [presence]. There’s been a move toward a much more conservative evangelicalism, which has become a lot more male-dominant, male-dominated. They clearly have a plan to dominate what’s happening here.” Tom Schreiner confirmed the institutional culture of complementarianism, and pointed to a possible cause: “I think the Southern Baptist infusion has a conservative leavening effect on the organization.”

Nearly all of the participants assumed that the majority of ETS members and leaders were complementarian, but some wondered if that institutional complementarianism was going to be actually codified and officially mandated. Erica said, “If complementarianism is not part of the statement of faith at ETS, then we need to stop acting like it is. If it is *de facto*, then you need to put it on the statement of faith and there will be a lot of men [and women] who drop their membership.” Dan Treier echoed this, saying if complementarianism was made an official policy, then “some of us would need to take prophetic action to step out [of ETS].”

Institutionalized Sexism

Women make up approximately six percent of all ETS members, including student and associate members.⁴⁷ Going into the project, we were informed it was seven percent and thus used that number in our interviews, and most participants already knew the “seven percent” number before we said it.⁴⁸

Not all were aware, however. When asked, “Why do you think female members make up seven percent?” one doctoral student interrupted the question to exclaim, “Let the record show that I was very astounded about that fact! That’s about a third of what I expected! . . . Wow. I am *so* thrown off.” After she stopped laughing, Brooke explained,

I expected more. . . . It does make me feel that there are a lot of women who have fallen by the wayside, a lot of evangelicals who have left along the way. I know some of them. And I know men who have stopped coming to ETS because of how women are treated.

Stuart, a current executive committee member, said it’s known as an “old white guys’ network,” but “I just never heard anything that would say this is not a welcoming place. I mean, I think if there were members who were not welcoming, I think they know they’re

barking up the wrong tree.” However, it was unclear if he has asked his women colleagues or students about their experiences. When informed about some subsectors of ETS that do not allow women to teach any Bible or theology classes to men,⁴⁹ Stuart appeared confused and said,

You keep bringing up all these folks that are ruining my thesis. I’m just dismayed. I guess I’d like to think that the primary evangelical traditions have moved on in education. You keep bringing up these folks that say that might not be as true as I’d like to think.

Louise and others, however, saw institutional sexism. When asked what role ETS should play in navigating conversations and differences on gender, Louise quickly replied,

I wouldn’t trust ETS to navigate it. . . . If women are here, [some would believe] it’s a failure of male leadership. If women were to thrive here, I think they would see it as more of a failure than a success. . . . The very thing we see as failure, or I see as failure, they see as a success. . . . Women haven’t taken charge.

Cristina Richie also said that ETS should not really take an active role, because “I know they are not going to promote equality. What they could do is *not* promote discrimination.”

Jane noted that the “status quo” of masculine, complementarian leadership hides “institutional or structural sexism.” She didn’t see many men who were “overtly sexist” which she explained as men “trying to take the vote away from women or have them quit their jobs.”⁵⁰ However, she explained:

There’s a male privilege at ETS that is structural. . . . And that is why men who would be strong advocates for women feel they can do so at a personal level and maybe just haven’t thought about [the system].

Yet many participants talked at length about institution and systems and how attention cannot only be paid to individual action, speech, or experience.

The Role of Men for the Future

The third major theme emerging from the research concerns power, authority, and the advocacy of men. Men, the vast majority of members and 100 percent of national leadership, greatly contribute to the negative *and* positive experiences of women at ETS. Even as they lamented the uneven distribution of power and uneven patronage system that makes it necessary, participants emphasized the importance of men advocating on behalf of women.

Samantha noted an absence of advocacy for women, but sees the male members and leadership as fairly neutral toward women’s presence. She believes they need to be more intentional in inviting more women into leadership:

Really it is people in positions of power, again I go back to privilege, those who have privilege need to advocate. Those who have privilege are the gatekeepers in a very real sense. So, there is a whole theory of the idea of power and access and the things won’t change unless that is part of their agenda.

. . . There is so much men can do positively to really advocate and bring women in, incorporate them into the networks. . . . You can use that privilege to advocate for diversity in the networks, to help incorporate those who are outside those networks.

Brooke echoed her sentiment:

I'm really only advocating for equality in a system where the male voice is valued over the female voice . . . Then it has to be the male voice that has to say, 'Here is the female voice.' It has to be the men who lament the lack of female participation and saying something that will make a difference. . . . But I don't think the organization will change until the men are also advocating and speaking up.

A number of participants reported that some advocacy is taking place, especially in the form of individual mentorship and networking, by both complementarian and egalitarian men. Old Testament professor M. Daniel (Danny) Carroll R. (Rodas) at Denver Seminary volunteered to share his experiences mentoring women because he said he'd recently "starting paying attention" to how women have suffered and been humiliated. He explained that there are problems with what he called "male patronage, [because] it's well-meaning and a certain form of advocacy, but in a sense it's a shame that it has to be that way. . . . But ultimately, it has to be, at least at this stage in history, it has to be the men in a male-dominated society."

Erica noted how men, like women, must negotiate a complex situation of power, authority, and responsibility at ETS:

I think you have to be very pragmatic and realistic about who has power. I think with power comes a responsibility. I don't ultimately think if you are in a position of power you can honestly say, 'I choose not to use my power in a way that can change a situation.' . . . I'm not saying every single male who might pick up on this has to be called to it at the same level. But an individual man taking a stand on this at ETS is going

to be marginalized, but if a large group of men says, 'What is going on here? How can we encourage women in scholarship? How can we do this?' that would be heard. If a woman does it, she's going to be totally marginalized because 'that's just her agenda.' . . . I don't think every man . . . is ethically and biblically bound to make that [his] cause, but if there were some initiative or some movement, yeah, it's time to stand up and be counted. I feel that [this is necessary] because ETS is still to a large extent a man's world.

Erica was not alone in expressing mixed feelings about male advocacy. Many appreciated and recognized the need for men as mentors and advocates, but also expressed feelings of frustration that such advocacy was necessary. Isabelle is a doctoral student who occasionally guest teaches for a professor at a seminary that has no women faculty in any discipline.

[He] makes sure people don't graduate from the seminary without me teaching them at least once, so that the men all had an experience of being taught by a woman. . . . So he makes a place for me and gives me a voice even though I don't have an official voice. . . . He runs interference for me and protects me. You know, as a grown woman, I don't really want someone doing that for me. Yet in that space, that's the only way I can operate.

On the whole, women were not particularly optimistic that they themselves could make ETS a better experience. Many of the participants, both male and female, saw men's advocacy on behalf of and in partnership with women as the best way forward for greater inclusion of women at all levels of ETS. However, some of the participants were unsure if the ETS leadership and

Join the Conversation

Join CBE **Tuesday, November 17** for its annual ETS community dinner, followed by a special presentation and conversation on "A Question Mark Over My Head" led by Emily Zimbrick-Rogers.

DINNER

November 17, 5:30–7:15 pm
Hard Rock Cafe, 215 Peachtree Street NE
(a short walk from the Hilton)

RESEARCH PRESENTATION

November 17, 7:45–9:15 pm
Atlanta Hilton, room 301
Open to the public

Visit CBE's booth (#28) for a flyer with a map to the dinner, or to learn more. We hope to see you there!

the ETS general membership were fully supportive of women in ETS. Additionally, encouraging men's advocacy has its risks. Men, like women, have many conflicting demands to negotiate. Some might see their calling as advocating for women at their own institutions rather than at the ETS society level. Other men who could be advocates might fail to give adequate support because of the high personal or professional costs. Finally, relying on men to bring about change has the potential to replicate the male power structures where women are non-actors and only "allowed" a voice or presence by the good will of men.

Discussion

The quotes above show that the majority of women experienced an atmosphere of hostility, marginalization, and exclusion at ETS. They related this atmosphere to the institutional sexism and culture of complementarianism that permeates ETS. However, the participants noted that in spite of these discouraging forces, women continued to present papers, lead sessions, and produce solid scholarship. Only Isabelle and Karen talked about possibly not returning to ETS; the rest planned to keep coming because "presence is important," as Anthea McCall said. Some women felt hopeful that their competent scholarship would continue to open doors, while others felt more change might come as men advocated for greater inclusion of diverse voices. Most participants saw the need for both aspects.

This project was initially about the experiences of women, but women and men participants called on men to act on behalf of and in partnership with women at ETS. Several participants referenced the New Testament cruciform community abdicating power for the benefit of the powerless.^{51,52} Without the intentional, sustained, and institutional welcome from men with power and authority, then the situation for women at ETS does not look like it will change.

In this limited study, egalitarian women seemed to have more negative experiences at ETS than complementarian or hierarchical women. A related narrative, which was unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, was that egalitarian men seem to have been silenced, have left ETS, or are very marginally involved and do not take on—or are perhaps prevented from—any leadership in the organization. What also appears to be missing in this case study are the voices of women who were fearful of participating, even anonymously.⁵³ Finally, further research is especially needed to study the compounded marginalization of people of color in ETS.

Participants wondered if ETS's current leadership and the broad consensus of ETS members wish for ETS to truly become the Evangelical Complementarian Society, or become open to shared leadership and voice legitimacy for egalitarian men and women. It remains to be seen if those affiliated with CBMW and/or the SBC will continue to dominate the nominating committee and the executive committee or if other voices will be allowed or invited in.

Women and the Future of ETS

Many of the participants explained why the situation of women in ETS matters for much more than just the few hundred women ETS members. Frances said, "I think it is a problem because the majority of evangelicals are women, so if you have this thinking body, and the primary people doing the thinking are men, you are not representing the Body." The Southern Baptist women,

who did not report any sexism at ETS, also emphasized the need for women to be active in ETS and contributing scholarship. Katie McCoy, SWBTS doctoral student and editor of the site BiblicalWoman.org, said,

Obviously we need to see more women in academic scholarly thought. . . . We need women to be thinking through not only women's issues, but we need women to be voices in the echo chamber, so to speak, of current issues and theological questions.

As we heard in the interviews, there were multiple layers of institutional culture and structural hurdles for women to overcome at ETS. While women planned to keep returning to ETS, many wondered about the future and if the ultra-conservative complementarians would make the space so hostile and inhospitable that they themselves could not keep returning, or if younger women would opt out and head to more welcoming environments like IBR or SBL/AAR. Cristina Richie said,

It can be too difficult and depressing and unhealthy, if you just constantly have to go over why a woman can teach, why you can even be there and be hired—it's exhausting. . . . I hope ETS makes some changes, because I think women are going to keep leaving and finding someplace where they are appreciated.

As the participants noted, women's inclusion or exclusion at ETS has much broader implications for the wider evangelical academy and the evangelical church than simply the comfort and welcome of a few hundred women presenting papers at an academic conference. The status and experience of women in ETS can provide a useful, albeit limited, case study of women's experiences in evangelical biblical studies and theology. It is hoped that these findings will enable ETS members and leadership to better understand the experience of women at ETS. With greater understanding, ETS individual members, both women and men, and ETS leadership, can better determine what the future of women at ETS could or should look like.

NOTES

1. The phrase "a question mark over my head" comes from Christa McKirland, whose quote is provided in greater context later in the article.
2. Special thanks to the assistance of Jennifer L. Aycock in this project.
3. Multiple sources address these differences including organizations and books. A starting place is: Christians for Biblical Equality at <http://www.cbinternational.org/>; The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood at <http://cbmw.org/>; Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee, ed., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (2nd ed., Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991). A short historical overview can be found in Sally K. Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism," *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 215–237, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost.
4. John Piper, "Should Women be Police Officers?" *Desiring God* (blog), August 13, 2015 <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-women-be-police-officers>.
5. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) has addressed aspects of gender and leadership. The research is vast, but a sample includes Samuel Joeckel and Thomas Chesnes, "The Challenge of Gender Equity Within the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities," *Christian Higher Education* 8, no. 2 (April 2009): 115–131, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost; Karen A. Longman and Shawna L. Lafreniere, "Moving Beyond the Stained Glass Ceiling: Preparing Women for Leadership in Faith-Based Higher Education," *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 14, no. 1 (2011): 45–61; Karen Longman, "Leadership Literature: Implications for Christian Higher Education," in *Thriving in Leadership: Strategies for Making a Difference in Christian Higher Education* (ed. Karen Longman; Abilene,

Tex.: Abilene Christian, 2012), 26; Amy Reynolds, "Gender Dynamics in Evangelical Institutions: Women and Men Leading in Higher Education and the Nonprofit Sector," *Women in Leadership National Study Report* (Wenham, MA: Gordon College, 2014), <http://www.gordon.edu/womeninleadership/report>, 11. In full disclosure, Imago Dei Fund funded the Women in Leadership National Study and is a financial supporter of Christians for Biblical Equality, which provided the author's travel expenses for the Women at ETS case study.

6. Individuals, not institutions, are members of ETS, thus ETS does not compile information on institutions. Therefore, it is impossible to surmise the full institutional pictures of women related to ETS. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accredits most of the institutions represented at ETS. Thus these numbers are derived from Association of Theological Schools, 2013–2014 Annual Data Tables, table 3.1-A and table 2.12-A, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2013-2014-annual-data-tables.pdf>.

7. J. Michael Thigpen, email message to author, September 17, 2015.

8. J. Michael Thigpen, email message to author, September 17, 2015.

9. J. Michael Thigpen, email message to author, September 17, 2015.

10. Cristina Richie, "The Present and Future of the ETS: Women's Involvement with the Society, the Journal, and Membership," *Missing Voices* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2014). Also presented as a paper at the ETS Annual Meeting, 2013, Baltimore. For 2015, there appears to be three women in regional leadership positions, according to the ETS Regions page, accessed September 14, 2015 http://www.etsjets.org/region/regions_overview.

11. J. Michael Thigpen, email message to author, September 17, 2015: "There are 56 units this year, so 21% of the units have women in leadership and 9% have women as chairs or co-chairs."

12. The 1986 ETS Annual Meeting with the "theme 'Male and Female in Biblical and Theological Perspective' drew a record attendance of approximately 350 registered members." Organized by Program Chairman Walter M. Dunnett. The first plenary session was Richard G. Lee, senior pastor of Rehoboth Baptist Church. "Other plenary speakers were Catherine Kroeger, Gilbert Bilezikian, Wayne Grudem, Walter Liefeld, David Scholer and Aida Spencer. President Gleason Archer delivered his presidential address." "Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting," *JETS* 30/1 (March 1987) 121, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/30/30-1/30-1-pp121-124_JETS.pdf.

13. In the spirit of full disclosure, Catherine Clark Kroeger was the first president of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) and one of the founders, and Aida Besançon Spencer has long been active in CBE and was awarded the CBE Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005.

14. I am grateful for the research participants who were willing to share their stories. Thank you to those who are both named and unnamed. I also wish to thank others who assisted in this project: Tim Krueger, for editing; Jennifer L. Aycock, for research assistance, transcriptions, analytic brainstorming, and editing; Dorothy and Grant Zimbrick, for transcriptions and childcare; and Charles Zimbrick-Rogers, for qualitative methodology sources and frameworks, conceptual and analytical discussions, and editing. Any errors are fully mine.

15. When I presented the idea of a case study of women at ETS to Mimi Haddad, Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) president and ETS Evangelicals and Gender Study Group co-chair, she found financial support for my and my research assistant's travel and ETS expenses and provided me mentorship and oversight to conduct the project as part of my Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS) internship at CBE. The Women at ETS case study was the main component of an MDiv long-distance, yearlong internship at CBE, for which I received field education credit at PTS. This article is the final product of this research study. In addition to being an MDiv student at Princeton, I am an alumna of Wheaton College and self-identify as egalitarian, evangelical, and feminist. I have been a member of CBE for approximately a decade.

16. Some of the participants did not self-identify with either label, although these individuals described their beliefs in ways that usually, but not always, fell more within an "egalitarian" position rather than a "complementarian" position.

17. Normally, I would also identify people's beliefs on marriage and family and how they differed from one group to another, but for the purpose of this study, the focus is on women's gifts, abilities, calling, and roles of teaching and leadership in the academy and a small amount how that relates to the church, and thus this article will not engage with people's beliefs on marriage headship or equality.

18. Reynolds, "Gender Dynamics in Evangelical Institutions." See note 4.

19. Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 2012); Cynthia Liefer, "Let's Face It: Gender Bias in Academia is For Real," *Elsevier SciTech Connect*, August 19, 2015, <http://scitechconnect.elsevier.com/gender-bias-in-academia/>; Karen Longman and Susan R. Madsen, *Women*

and Leadership in Higher Education, Women and Leadership: Research, Theory, and Practice (Charlotte: Information Age, 2014).

20. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 2013); Mary Field Belenky, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (10th anniversary ed., New York: Basic Books, 1997); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Thinking Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine D. Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries: Evangelical Women, Feminism, and the Theological Academy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); Faye D. Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (updated edition; Berkeley: University of California, 1998); Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 2012); Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2006); Mary Romero and Abigail J. Stewart, *Women's Untold Stories* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

21. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1987); Jackson W. Carroll, et al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools*, Religion in America Series (New York: Oxford University, 1997); Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2000); R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997); Tanya M. Luhmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Knopf, 2012); Joseph B. Tamney, *The Resilience of Conservative Religion: The Case of Popular, Conservative Protestant Congregations* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge, 2002); R. Stephen Warner, *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).

22. See Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

23. *Living on the Boundaries*, by Hoggard Creegan and Pohl, is a notable exception.

24. Canell, Fenella, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham: Duke, 2006); Allyson Julé and Bettina Tate Pedersen, eds., *Being Feminist, Being Christian: Essays from Academia* (1st ed., New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

25. Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*; Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling* (Boston: Harvard, 2001); Kenneth Plummer, *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2001); Romero and Stewart, *Women's Untold Stories*.

26. The interview guide included 12 basic questions, such as "Walk me through your personal and professional trajectory that has led to your participation in ETS"; "What is your experience of ETS as a woman?"; "What is your perspective on the women who make up the 7 percent of ETS membership?"; "What scriptural passages shape your understanding of gender and vocation?"

27. John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2012); Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (3rd ed., London: Routledge, 2007); Ochs and Capps, *Living Narratives*.

28. Participants were given the option to use their real names or to choose a pseudonym. Half of the participants chose their own first-name pseudonym (e.g., "Erica"), and the other half chose to go by their full names (e.g., "Anthea McCall"). Descriptive details have been left vague to protect participants' anonymity.

29. Unfortunately ETS membership breakdown by race/ethnicity could not be determined. Many of the participants pointed to lack of non-white voices, especially African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, and non-Western Christians. Asian-American males seem to be better presented in ETS, as seen in a consultation on Asian/Asian-American Theology. However, Edwin Yamauchi, the Japanese-American former president of ETS, and others, have highlighted the lack of minority voices. For 2015, there were two additional program units that focused on non-white/non-American voices: Other Voices in Interpretation and Scripture and Theology in Global Context.

30. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*; Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (4th ed., Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2009)

31. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

32. Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*; Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2013); Yin, *Case Study Research*.

33. Italics mark emphasis in participants' original quotes.

34. Some participants made comments comparing and contrasting experiences at other academic societies, namely Institute for Biblical Research (IBR) and

Society for Biblical Literature (SBL). Not all participants were involved in IBR or SBL, though many were. Some of the participants had been in the past or were currently in leadership in these organizations. A few participants had participated in the American Academy of Religion (AAR).

35. Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970); Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., *Presumed Incompetent*.

36. One prominent complementarian was cited more than 16 times by combined participant comments.

37. Multiple essays in Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., *Presumed Incompetent*, illustrate the compounded oppressions on racial minorities in the secular academy. No woman of color theologian contributed a chapter to this book.

38. See Emily L. Zimbrick-Rogers, "A 'Question Mark over My Head': Learning from the Narratives of Female Theologians in the Evangelical Academy," (paper presented at the annual meeting of Christians for Biblical Equality, Los Angeles, July 2015) for greater detail on Betsy, who has made it into the final round of interviews for four faculty positions. During the fourth job cycle she was basically offered the job until the administration determined she had to personally ascribe to male-elder complementarianism to work at the institution. This was not in the theological distinctives or statement of beliefs of that institution. The recording can be purchased at <http://www.equalitydepot.com/livingnarrativesofevangelicalwomen.aspx>.

39. This is how Betsy later described it when her quotes were sent to her for inclusion in this article.

40. Jessica Boggs, email message to author, September 28, 2015, and Carol Kaminski, email message to author, September 8, 2015. Carol Kaminski is the woman officer (out of five) and three women are IBR board members out of eleven.

41. Samantha: "One of the things I have discovered, if you don't see a woman doing the kinds of things that you're doing or want to do, you can't imagine it. So I think there is such an importance in having women Bible teachers. For women to have that kind of example. The same thing with presenting and publishing—the more women who are doing it, the more other women are encouraged to do it."

42. Several of the older participants mentioned the 1986 Atlanta ETS, which was the last time on record for women plenary speakers, which included Aída Besançon Spencer and Catherine Clark Kroeger. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) professor and executive committee member Tom Schreiner mentioned the session but only named Gilbert Bilezikian and Wayne Grudem as the presenters. I mentioned Aída and Catherine, and Tom replied, "I didn't remember that. My memory isn't as sharp. I didn't remember Catherine and Aída were in it."

43. *Missing Voices* was the title of the CBE special edition journal for ETS members 2014. Most of the articles published in it were rejected for publication from *JETS*. *Missing Voices* can be accessed at <http://www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/ETS2014-web-1.pdf>

44. None of the current board members are publically egalitarians, though it is unknown about all of their individual personal beliefs. Three board members were interviewed. All three of these identify as complementarians.

45. Several participants, both male and female, described various subsectors in ETS, which one participant called "two ETS-es": "mainstream evangelical institutions—e.g., Wheaton, Bethel, Trinity, Gordon-Conwell, Westminster—would be what I would see as my kind of people. But in ETS there's also a second type, represented by much more fundamentalistic [word in original] institutions—e.g., Liberty, The Master's Seminary, those kinds of places. . . . And now there is a third group—the Southern Baptists."

46. Data analysis on the official ETS Annual Meeting Program 2014 reveal the following:

Institution	Sessions (paper or moderator)	Plenary at 2014 ETS	Presidents since founding
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (and Boyce College)	52	1	2
Wheaton College and Graduate School	44	0	6
Talbot School of Theology/Biola University	43	1	3
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	34	0	1

Institution	Sessions (paper or moderator)	Plenary at 2014 ETS	Presidents since founding
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School/ Trinity International University	31	0	4
Dallas Theological Seminary	25	0	7 (including 2015 president-elect Dan Wallace)

If presenters from the other Southern Baptist seminaries were added (Southeastern, New Orleans, Midwestern, and Golden Gate), then the Southern Baptist-affiliated presenters would be the majority.

47. J. Michael Thigpen, email message to author, September 17, 2015.

48. Mimi Haddad, "Fewer than 240 women in an organization of over 3,400," fund raising letter, October 2011. CBE had signs at their booth a few years running that graphically represented this and some people referred to the CBE public service announcement of this fact. However, the number of full members is unknown since Thigpen said there was no breakdown of gender by full, associate, or student members.

49. I was unable to research all of the institutions represented at ETS. However, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) seminaries do not have any woman teaching any men in the Bible or theology departments (some of the SBC seminaries do include women in intercultural studies and counseling). Many seminaries do not have any women as full-time tenured professors but do have women teaching Bible and theology classes in adjunct, part-time, or online capacities.

50. A different research participant, Louise, mentioned a colleague of hers who is active in ETS and who "doesn't even believe women should have been given the right to vote."

51. "The image of the cross should not be used by those who hold power in order to ensure the acquiescent suffering of the powerless. Instead, the New Testament insists that *the community as a whole* is called to follow in the way of Jesus' suffering. The New Testament writers consistently employ the pattern of the cross precisely to call those who possess power and privilege to *surrender* it for the sake of the weak (see, e.g. Mark 10:42–45, Rom. 15:1–3, 1 Cor. 8:1–11:1)." Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 197.

52. Daniel B. Wallace proposed that the current power brokers of the church have a responsibility to change things. See Wallace, "Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? The Confessions of a Noncharismatic Evangelical," *Christianity Today* 38, no. 10 (September 12, 1994), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1994/sepember12/4ta035.html>: "[W]e men have failed to listen to the women in our midst—and this failure is related to our not hearing the voice of the Spirit. If the imago Dei is both male and female, by squelching the contribution of women we distort that very image before a watching world."

53. Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. González, "Introduction," 1–14 in Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., *Presumed Incompetent*. The editors explained that contributors who declined participation in their book did so because of "fear of retaliation," fear of pointing fingers, fear of personal and professional ridicule, uncertainty of their job security, and because they felt their experiences were "relatively benign." Women members and attendees at the ETS annual meeting relayed similar reasons for declining to participate.



Emily Louise Zimbrick-Rogers was the 2014-15 research intern for Christians for Biblical Equality. In addition to conducting a case study of women in evangelicalism at the Evangelical Theological Society, Emily wrote a high school curriculum entitled *God, Sex, and You: Who You Are and Why it Matters*. She is an MDiv student at Princeton Theological Seminary.

“Equal In Being, Unequal In Role”

Exploring the Logic of Woman’s Subordination

Rebecca Merrill Groothuis

This article is taken from *Discovering Biblical Equality* edited by Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee. Copyright (c) Second Edition, by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, USA. www.ivpress.com.

According to Aristotle, the male is “by nature fitter for command than the female.”¹ According to John Piper and Wayne Grudem, male authority and female submission are integral to the “deeper differences,” the “underlying nature” and the “true meaning” of manhood and womanhood.² Men have the inherent right and responsibility to direct the affairs of others. Women are meant to be in submission, to have their affairs directed by men.³ It seems that in both Aristotelian thought and evangelical patriarchy, the subordination of women to male authority follows from what is understood to be the created nature of maleness and femaleness.⁴ Authority is deemed natural and fitting for men, and submission is deemed natural and fitting for women.

Yet there is one respect in which evangelical patriarchy has departed from Aristotle—and from the Western theologians and philosophers who have followed in his intellectual footsteps.⁵ Aristotle maintained that it is precisely *because* “the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior, [that] the one rules, and the other is ruled.”⁶ Historically, male superiority was assumed to inhere primarily in a natural male advantage in morality and rationality. But when evangelical patriarchalists today claim that male leadership is natural and fitting given the deeper differences of masculinity and femininity, they accompany this claim with protestations that women are not morally or rationally deficient with respect to men; rather, men and women are “equal in being” but “different” (that is, unequal) in “function” or “role.”⁷

Aristotle’s conclusion—that men are by nature fitter for command than women—has been retained. Aristotle’s premise—that men are by nature morally and rationally superior to women—has been rejected (which leaves the rationale for the conclusion somewhat unclear). Today it is undeniable that many women *are* morally and intellectually qualified for leadership. Although some patriarchalists may wish to categorize such women as “exceptions,” the ban on women assuming “male” leadership roles is without exception. No matter how stellar a woman’s spiritual and intellectual qualifications, this can *never* overrule the unalterable fact of her female nature, which dictates that in church and home she must not have authority over a man but must support and submit to man’s authority over her.

But notice that in evangelical patriarchy a woman’s subordination still follows—necessarily and permanently—from what she necessarily and permanently is by nature (namely, female). Her personal being decides and determines her subordinate status. Piper and Grudem concur: “Scripture and nature teach that personal manhood and womanhood are indeed relevant in deciding . . . who gives primary leadership in the relationship.”⁸ Men’s authority and women’s subordination are integral to “what true manhood and womanhood *are*.”⁹ The essence of masculinity is a sense of leadership, and the essence of femininity is a disposition to submit to male leadership.¹⁰ In other words, men are to lead because authority

is a constitutive element of masculinity, and women are to submit to male leadership because submission is a constitutive element of femininity. A man is fit to lead by virtue of his male nature. A woman, by virtue of her female nature, is not.

Despite the rhetoric of “roles” and “equality,” it seems that a fundamental similarity remains between Aristotle and the evangelical patriarchalists of today. Woman’s subordinate status is—as it has always been—decided solely by woman’s female being. Whether woman is deemed unable to rule because of her mental and moral inferiority (historic patriarchy) or whether just *being* female makes a woman unfit for authority or decision making (today’s patriarchy), it appears to be on account of a prior assumption about the meaning and nature of womanhood that women are not expected or permitted to share authority equally with men. By virtue of her female being a woman is fit to be subject to man’s will and unfit to exercise her own will with the freedom and authority accorded a man. Nothing she *does* either confirms or negates this state of affairs. Aristotle would have agreed.

Unpacking the Rhetoric of Roles

Although evangelical patriarchy is similar to traditional patriarchy in key respects, it also trades heavily on the distinctive and historically novel claim that women are “equal in being but unequal in role.” In other words, women are the equals of men spiritually and in their “being,” but when it comes to living out the meaning and purpose of manhood and womanhood, women must submit to male rule. This distinction between being and function—or ontology and role—is fundamental to the doctrine of male leadership today. The distinction between equal being and unequal role serves as the hermeneutical lens through which the biblical data are interpreted. It is the theoretical construct that permits evangelical patriarchalists to interpret the submission texts as universal statements on the creational “roles” of manhood and womanhood, while also acknowledging biblical teaching on the spiritual and ontological equality of man and woman.

The “role” relationship of woman’s subordination to man’s authority is typically presented as a matter of “complementarity,” “mutual interdependence” and “beneficial differences” between the sexes, without any implication of woman’s inferiority.¹¹ The carefully chosen terminology serves to make this position appear plausible and persuasive to modern ears. Who can deny that there must be different roles,

functional distinctions and a certain order in any human society? Or that male and female are complementary? Given the choice of rhetoric, it all sounds quite sensible and acceptable. As a result, many evangelicals find themselves perplexed by two antithetical interpretations of biblical teaching on gender relations—egalitarianism and patriarchalism—both of which

Connect With CBE

Connect with CBE at ETS to join the conversation and find resources.

1. Stop by CBE's booth (#28). Browse our selection of books, articles, and recordings.

2. Enter a drawing. While you're at the booth, enter to win one of two prizes:

- **5 winners** will receive CBE's DVD series, *Is Gender Equality a Biblical Ideal?*
- **1 winner** will receive a women in leadership resource package including...
 - *Thriving in Leadership* by Karen Longman
 - *Women & Leadership in Higher Education* edited by Karen Longman and Susan Madsen
 - *Women as Global Leaders* edited by Faith Wambura Ngunjiri and Susan Madsen
 - Recording of "Advancing Women in Leadership," a workshop by Karen Longman

3. Join the Evangelicals and Gender Study Group on 11/17 at 2:00–5:10 p.m. Hilton-405. Papers include:

- Karin Ryan (The Carter Center): "A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power: How faith leaders can work to align religious life with human rights advocacy"
- Jamin Hübner (John Witherspoon College): "The Evolution of Complementarian Exegesis"
- Jeff Miller (Milligan College): "Gender Language in Worship"
- Philip Barton Payne (Linguist's Software, Inc.): "Vaticanus Distigme-Obelus Symbols Marking Added Text, Including 1 Cor 14:34–35"

appear to be plausible in some respects and problematic in other respects. It can seem to be a toss-up. But what if it is not logically possible for the same person to be at once spiritually and ontologically equal and permanently, comprehensively and necessarily subordinate? What if this sort of subordination cannot truthfully be described as merely a "role" or "function" that has no bearing on one's inherent being or essence?

I believe we can choose between the two biblical interpretations by assessing each one in light of two fundamental premises. The first premise is theological: according to Scripture, women and men are equal spiritually and ontologically—a point that is uncontested in the gender debate. The second premise is logical: the foundational and indisputable law of noncontradiction, which states that A and non-A cannot both be true at the same time in the same respect.¹² The law of noncontradiction is not a mere human construct that God's truth somehow transcends. Rather, it is necessary and fundamental to all meaningful discourse and communication—including God's revelation of his Word in Scripture. That is why biblical scholars who hold to the Bible's infallibility seek to resolve apparent contradictions in Scripture: it is axiomatic that if the Bible contradicts itself, then it cannot be true in all that it affirms.¹³

Evangelical patriarchalists contend that women are unequal in a different respect from the way they are equal. I will argue that given its nature and rationale, woman's unequal "role" entails woman's unequal being. Thus it contradicts woman's equality in being and so renders contradictory (and therefore untrue) the evangelical patriarchal interpretation of Scripture that sees woman as equal but subordinate. This leaves only two logically tenable options. Either (1) women are created by God for perpetual subordination to men and so are not equal to men in their nature/being/essence, or (2) women are created equal with men and so cannot be permanently, comprehensively and necessarily subordinate to men. But option 1 contradicts premise 1. Since Scripture cannot contradict itself, option 2 is the only position that is both logically and biblically tenable.

In part one of the chapter it will be argued that the *equal being/unequal role* construct fails to defend the subordination of women against the implication of women's inferiority.¹⁴ First, I will consider what is meant by spiritual equality and ontological equality (equality of being) and will show how evangelical patriarchalism fails to honor and acknowledge such equality. Although spiritual equality is entailed by ontological equality, it will be addressed separately because of its particular relevance to this debate. I will then consider the nature and significance of the "different roles" that patriarchalists assign to women and men and will argue that these "roles" are not just about function but are fundamentally a matter of ontology or being. The purpose of these considerations

will be to show that evangelical patriarchy neither respects women's equality nor limits women's subordination to a merely functional role. Instead, the nature of women's inequality in "function" implies, by logical necessity, women's inequality in being.

In part two of the chapter I will respond to key counterarguments—ways in which proponents of patriarchy have attempted to defend the efficacy and validity of the *equal being/unequal role* construct against objections to it.¹⁵ This will include a brief critique of the analogy that patriarchalists draw between women's subordination in "role" and what they see as the eternal "role subordination" in the Trinity. I will argue that even if there were an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, the analogy fails fundamentally.

Part I

Equality in "Being"

A biblical understanding of human equality should begin with Genesis 1:26–28, where women and men together and without distinction are declared to be created in God's image and are given authority over all creation. In both their being (the divine image) and their calling (authority and dominion) men and women are creationally equal. On the basis of this foundational text, as well as the overall teaching of Scripture,¹⁶ evangelical egalitarians affirm an equality of human worth and human rights between women and men; that is, whatever human rights there may be, they belong no less to women than to men (since women are no less human than men).¹⁷ From this follows an equality of consideration, whereby women and men alike have opportunity to earn and attain the place in church and society that is appropriate for each individual's God-given abilities and calling.

While this understanding of human equality resembles that of classical (nineteenth and early twentieth century) liberal political philosophy, it is here grounded in and justified solely by the biblical revelation of God's creational design for male and female humanity. This happens to be one point at which secular culture got it right, doubtless due in large part to the West's Christian heritage (a more prevalent influence in earlier centuries than at present). A task of the biblical thinker is to agree with culture where it agrees with the Bible.¹⁸

Although there are variations in ability between individuals, the human equality between women (as a class) and men (as a class) assures that women are inherently able to participate equally with men in the various distinctively human activities.¹⁹ Due to both cultural and biological factors, there are some generalizable differences in behavior between women and men, and these differences not only determine different sexual and reproduction functions but may also make certain social roles generally (although not universally) more suitable for one gender than the other. However, these differences do not warrant the traditional notion that women are deficient in rationality and so are suited to be subordinate to men. Rather, the generally different aptitudes and proclivities of male and female point to ways in which women and men can complement one another as they live and work together in the context of a full recognition of their essential equality in maturity, giftedness, and social and spiritual value.

It should be evident from these observations that egalitarians do not affirm an equality of identity or sameness between women and men. Male and female are not identical. Sexual differences exist, and these differences make a difference. Sexual roles,

therefore, are not interchangeable between men and women.²⁰ Egalitarians and patriarchalists agree that women and men are not equal in the sense of being identical and that the differences between men and women are complementary and mutually beneficial. But there is considerable disagreement as to the nature, meaning and significance of these differences.

There are a number of different ways in which people, or groups of people, can be said to be equal.²¹ It seems that evangelical patriarchalists reject all types of equality between men and women, except equality in "being" (essence, nature, ontology) and human value. The question before us is whether the patriarchal paradigm in fact acknowledges female humanity to be fully human, equal in value to male humanity.

If women and men are both fully human, then women (as a class) and men (as a class) share equally in the distinctively human capacities, and no woman can be deemed inferior to a man in any such area solely on account of her womanhood. Distinctively human capacities are those that distinguish humans from other creatures. For example, higher intellectual functions such as rationality, ethical reasoning and the ability to analyze abstract concepts are unique to humans.²² Therefore it cannot be said that any given woman is any more or less likely than any given man to be fully equipped—in her God-given being—for such higher functions of the mind. More specifically, if women and men are equal in essence or being, then female humanity does not, in and of itself, suffer from a net deficiency of the valuable qualities and inherent capacities distinctively characteristic of human nature and human behavior.²³

Yet the doctrine of male rule presupposes that woman is uniquely designed by God *not* to perform certain distinctively human activities. In order to be true to her divine design and her God-given femininity, woman must not engage in these activities (which, per patriarchy, are no longer distinctively human but reclassified as distinctively masculine). By contrast, there are no uniquely human behaviors from which male humans must abstain in order to be true to their masculine being. No, masculinity is defined precisely in terms of certain distinctively human activities that only men are deemed fit to do—namely, the spiritual discernment and highlevel cognitive/rational behaviors involved in making decisions and directing and taking final responsibility for one or more other human beings.²⁴

According to the patriarchal paradigm, women do have their own uniquely feminine activities not shared by men—for example, bearing and rearing their young and being submissive and obedient to the master of the home. But note that these activities are not unique to human beings; rather, childbearing and nursing are shared with females of all mammal species, and submission to the household master is shared (albeit in a different sense!) with a wide array of household pets.²⁵ Certainly, it is a privilege and joy for women to bear and rear children. The point is not to diminish the value of motherhood but to note that while childbearing and nursing are distinctively female capabilities, they are not, in and of themselves, among the distinctively human capabilities (such as high-level rationality).

Patriarchal men, for their part, govern their homes and churches—making decisions, teaching the whole body of believers, ascertaining and making final determinations of God's will for their families—and women do not. Furthermore, women *could* bear authority and responsibility for these things equally with men, but they do not because they are not permitted to do so. Men, by contrast, do not bear or nurse children, simply because they are not

able to do so. The one is the “can’t” of permission denied; the other is the “can’t” of personal inability. This is not a case of equally dividing different opportunities and abilities between the sexes.

Nonetheless, those who insist that the woman must submit her mind and will to that of the man who is the master of the household also insist that the woman is equal to the man in her humanity and human value. But the full humanity of womanhood is not honored or recognized when what is deemed constitutive of femininity is shared by the lower species while what is deemed constitutive of masculinity is unique to the human species. This delineation of male-female “difference” fails to acknowledge the full humanity of woman. This is not to say that people with less ability in any of the distinctively human functions are somehow less human. However, when all women—purely by virtue of their womanhood—are denied opportunity to fully engage all the uniquely human capacities (to the degree of their ability), this logically implies that womanhood *per se* is characterized by a deficit of certain distinctively human traits.

Always, with patriarchy, it is the female human’s *being* that is the decisive factor; it alone is sufficient to consign her to being subordinate. Because her human being is female, she is subordinate. As Raymond Ortlund puts it, “A man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God.”²⁶ So while woman is said to be equal in her essential being, she is deemed subordinate precisely because of her essential being. Yet the notion that woman is equal *in* her being yet unequal *by virtue of* her being is incoherent.

Could this inconsistency be reconciled by asserting that woman is equal in her *human* being but not equal in her *female* being? It seems not. There is, after all, no generic humanity; human “being” is either male or female. If I am equal in my human being, then I am equal in my female human being, because female is what my human being is. Or, conversely, human is what my female being is. At all times and in every respect, my “being” is essentially and intrinsically female and human. If I am unequal as a *female* human being, then I am unequal as a human being.

Given the above considerations, it seems warranted to conclude that patriarchy cannot fully acknowledge woman’s human equality in being but rather implies her inferiority in being. This is even further in evidence when we examine woman’s *spiritual* place in the patriarchal scheme of things.

Spiritual Equality

The human spirit—that which enables us to know and communicate with God—is inherent in the divine image. This spiritual capacity is definitive of and unique to human beings, among all God’s earthly creatures. Scripture is clear that women and men equally bear God’s image and rule over God’s creation (Gen 1:26–28). God, at creation, gave spirituality and authority to male and female alike. This is the divine, uncorrupted, creational design. Nowhere in the Genesis creation account is this qualified by any mention of different kinds of spirituality or different degrees of authority for man and for woman.²⁷

If women and men are equal before God, then surely God desires the same sort of relationship with female believers that God desires with male believers. There is no reason to believe that God’s treatment and expectations of women with respect to spiritual concerns should be significantly different from God’s treatment and expectations of men. By extension, we in the church have no basis for treating women as somehow less fit for certain spiritual gifts and

ministries. Nor should we expect any woman to have a more distantly removed or “different” sort of relationship with God simply because she is a woman.²⁸ Equality before God means that every believer may approach God, and minister to God, on the same terms—through Jesus Christ alone, in submission to the Holy Spirit.

So let us consider how the truth of spiritual equality fares in the context of woman’s subordination to man’s authority. In evangelical patriarchy today, the authority reserved exclusively for men is largely a *spiritual* authority. That is, within the contexts of marriage and the church, the exposition of God’s Word and the discernment of God’s will (and the decision making that follows such discernment) are deemed the “final responsibility” of men alone. Although there occasionally appears some general expression of concern that women not appear too authoritative (i.e., masculine) in everyday interactions in society at large—Piper, for example, wants to ensure that if a woman gives a man directions to the freeway, she does so in a properly feminine (submissive) manner²⁹—the primary concern appears to be the exercise of spiritual authority.

Evangelical patriarchy teaches that the man is divinely charged with responsibility and authority to discern God’s will on behalf of himself and his wife and children. Whether or not he gives consideration to his wife’s insights, interests and expertise (as patriarchal teaching typically urges him to do), his “final decision” concerning God’s will for the family has binding authority.³⁰ As George Knight puts it, “Because the headship of the husband is established by God, the husband who fulfills that role does so as a servant of God, and the leadership given to him in this role expresses God’s authority in the marriage.” Given that the husband’s authority over the wife represents the authority of God, a wife “should submit to her husband as she submits to the Lord.” Such submission is analogous to “the godly submission a Christian renders to the Lord Jesus.”³¹

Patriarchal doctrine requires, in both marriage and the larger believing community, that men obey and hear from God directly while women obey and hear from God by hearing from and obeying the man or men in spiritual authority over them. A woman does not have direct authority under God but is under the spiritual authority of man, who mediates to her the Word and the will of God for her life. Woman’s traditionally subordinate place within the social relationships of church and home is largely a consequence of the subordinate place in which she is believed to stand in the spiritual order. But note that this arrangement is not, as is often claimed, spiritual equality plus social inequality.³² It is, quite simply, spiritual inequality.

According to key representatives of evangelical patriarchy, God has invested the man with the spiritual authority “to decide, in the light of Holy Scripture, what courses of action will most glorify God” for his family.³³ The man is “finally responsible” for both his own and his wife’s moral and spiritual condition.³⁴ The husband’s authority “expresses God’s authority in the marriage.”³⁵ The man’s role in the family has him “standing in the place of Christ,”³⁶ to “act *as* Christ” and “*for* Christ” with respect to his wife,³⁷ obligating him to “protect [his family] from the greatest enemies of all, Satan and sin.”³⁸ But if these things be true—if, indeed, only a man and never a woman can be deemed fit to serve as a stand-in for Christ, and if every married woman actually *needs* a man to serve in this capacity for her (which must be the case if the man’s “headship” is to be an act of love and service rather than presumption and condescension)—then it follows that men and women are not on the same spiritual level at all.

Nowhere does the Bible say that it is a man’s job to discern the will of God, take responsibility for another person’s spirituality and

protect others from Satan and sin. If God has given responsibility and dominion to both male and female (Gen 1:26–28), if we all stand on equal ground before God (Gal 3:26–28), if women are equal heirs of the grace of God (1 Pet 3:7) and if all believers together—both men and women—form God’s new priesthood (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10), then there is no reason for anyone to take this sort of spiritual responsibility for anyone else. If Jesus Christ is a female believer’s Lord and Savior in the same way that he is a male believer’s, then surely no Christian woman has need of a man to stand in the place of Christ for her.

Despite popular evangelical teaching, the New Testament never says the man authoritatively represents God as the priest of the home.³⁹ This teaching may derive from a misunderstanding of the analogy Paul draws in Ephesians 5:21–33 between a husband as “head” of his wife, and Christ as “head” of the church. Patriarchalists readily perceive that Paul did not mean that the husband is like Christ in redeeming his wife from her sins, for this would contradict biblical teaching elsewhere. Yet neither did Paul mean that the husband—like Christ—has the authority to serve as a priestly mediator between God and his wife; for this contradicts biblical teaching that Christ is the one mediator between God and humans (1 Tim 2:5, see also Mt 11:27; Jn 14:6). What Paul *was* saying by means of this analogy is evident from his description of the husband’s Christlike ministry of life-giving, self-giving love for his wife (Eph 5:25–30).⁴⁰ As Christ loves, nurtures, provides for and sacrifices his own life and special (divine) prerogatives for the church, so should the husband for his wife; as the church submits to the ministry of Christ (and as believers submit to one another, Eph 5:21), so should the wife to her husband.⁴¹

Under the new covenant, every believer is a representative of God (2 Cor 5:20) with direct access to God through Christ our high priest (Heb 4:14–16). Designating masculinity as a condition for the authoritative discernment and mediation of God’s will denies the equal access to God through Christ that the new covenant provides to all believers.⁴²

A male hierarchy of spiritual communication and command also violates the status and identity that every believer has in Christ. The New Testament teaches that God gives all believers the responsibility and prerogative to use their gifts, to preach the gospel, to teach other believers, to discern and obey the Word and will of God, to serve as priests unto God, to have the mind of Christ, to exercise spiritual authority in the name of Christ and to represent Christ to the world at large. Yet patriarchalists alter the teaching of God’s Word by enying to women a measure of each one of these God-given privileges and responsibilities, allocating to men the lion’s share of what the Bible speaks of as the status and calling of all believers.⁴³

Patriarchalists consign women to a permanently inferior status in a hierarchy of spiritual authority, calling, responsibility and privilege, all the while insisting that women are not spiritually inferior to men but that women and men stand on equal ground before God. This position is logically incoherent and so cannot be true. Women do not stand on equal ground before God if God has permanently denied them spiritual opportunities and privileges to which every man has access.

Difference in “Role” or “Function”

To say that two people differ in function is not necessarily to say that one is personally superior to the other. Therefore when we are told that men and women are equal yet have different functions, we can readily

agree with the face value of that statement. There are many instances in which equals have different roles—even roles of subordination and authority—yet with no entailment of personal inequality.⁴⁴

We can affirm that there are role differences between men and women without necessarily affirming that spiritual authority belongs by divine right to men. The latter belief does not follow from the former, and to reject the latter is not to reject the former. This conceptual distinction was not missed by respondents to a *Christianity Today* readers’ poll on gender issues. A significant number of people who agreed that men and women are “equal in personhood and value but different in roles” also rejected the idea that men should have primary leadership in churches and homes.⁴⁵ The existence of gender role differences neither entails nor justifies a permanent hierarchy of male authority.

Although functional differences often are compatible with personal equality, this is not always the case. Advocates of male authority seem to have difficulty acknowledging that the *reason* for the difference and the *nature* of the function determine whether such a difference can logically coexist with equality of being. As it happens, the reason for and the nature of woman’s subordination logically exclude woman’s equality.⁴⁶ The vocabulary of evangelical patriarchy reflects and reinforces this conceptual confusion. For example, woman’s lifelong subordination to male authority is routinely referred to as merely a “role difference” or “functional distinction.” Semantic strategies such as these subsume the disputed concept (woman’s subordination) under a larger—and largely undisputed—conceptual category (role differences, functional distinctions), thereby appearing to legitimate the disputed concept ipso facto.⁴⁷

By these and other means, patriarchalists implicitly present their *equal being/unequal function* defense of woman’s subordination in the following form:

1. Different function does not necessarily entail personal inferiority or superiority.
2. Woman’s subordination and man’s authority involve different functions.
3. Therefore the subordination of woman to man’s authority has nothing to do with female inferiority or male superiority; these are male-female role differences, pure and simple.

The argument is invalid. The premises are correct, but the conclusion does not follow logically from them. While the notion that equal beings may have different roles is certainly legitimate, it is not applicable to, or descriptive of, the male-female authority relations prescribed by evangelical patriarchalists. Patriarchy involves different functions, to be sure, but the different functions are grounded in supposed differences in the nature, meaning and purpose of manhood and womanhood. To describe as merely “roles” the different functions that follow from these ontological/teleological differences is to equivocate and obfuscate.

“Equal in being but subordinate in role” *can* accurately describe instances of functional subordination; however, it does not serve as a description of *every* relationship of subordination to authority, and it cannot accurately be applied to woman’s subordination. Female subordination is not functional subordination; therefore it cannot be justified on those grounds.

Functional subordination is typically determined either according to an individual’s abilities (or lack thereof) or for the sake of expediency in accomplishing a specific task; therefore such subordination is limited in scope or duration. An example

of functional subordination for the sake of expediency would be a person who serves on a committee under the direction of a coworker who is otherwise her equal in the organization; her subordination is limited to the task at hand, and it ends whenever the committee completes its work or she leaves the committee. An example of functional subordination based on unequal ability would be a student who is subordinated to his teacher—but only in the context and for the duration of the class.

Functional subordination is not necessarily limited in both scope and duration. If the subordinate's deficiency in ability is permanent (if he either cannot or will not overcome the deficiency), then his subordination in that area of deficiency will be permanent. If the unequal ability is innate, then the resulting subordination does reflect the person's inherently inferior ability in that particular area. But it need not indicate the subordinate's inferiority as a person, because the subordination remains limited in scope to the area of deficient ability; the person may far excel the average person in even more important areas of function.⁴⁸

Female subordination differs from functional subordination in its scope, duration and criterion. The subordination of women is limited neither in scope nor in duration. It is not based on inferior ability or designed to accomplish a temporary task. It is comprehensive (encompassing all that a woman does), permanent (extending throughout the life of a woman and applying to all women at all times) and decided solely by an unchangeable aspect of a woman's personal being (femaleness). Although femaleness is, in fact, irrelevant to ascertaining a person's innate abilities in the higher human functions involved in leadership, decision making and self-governance, these are precisely the functions from which women are permanently excluded; thus the inferiority of female persons in these key areas is clearly implied.

When subordination follows necessarily *and justifiably* from the subordinate person's unalterable nature, the subordinate *is* inferior in at least some aspect of her being; in this case, the scope and duration of the person's subordination will reflect the extent and significance of the inferiority. Because the subordination that is demanded by women's unalterable (female) being is of comprehensive scope and permanent duration—excluding women from a wide range of high-level, distinctively human functions—it implies an extensive and significant personal inferiority. But in this case the subordination is *not* justifiable, because women are not, in fact, innately inferior in these distinctively human capabilities. Put more formally and succinctly:

1. If the permanent, comprehensive and ontologically grounded subordination of women is justified, then women are inferior persons.
2. Women are not inferior persons.
3. Therefore women's subordination is not justified.⁴⁹

Another way to distinguish functional subordination from female subordination is in terms of the concepts of necessity and contingency. Something that is contingent obtains (is the case) only in certain contexts or under certain conditions. It is thus dependent, or contingent, on these contexts or conditions; it is not always and necessarily true. Unlike functional subordination, female subordination is not contingent. Because a woman is always and necessarily female, she is always and necessarily subordinate. No condition or context in this life nullifies her subordination to male authority.⁵⁰

Given evangelical patriarchy's theological premise that God designed man and woman at creation for a (benevolent) male-

rule relationship, it is necessary for a woman to be subordinate to male rule if she is to be true to the divinely designed meaning of womanhood. Not to submit would be unnatural and unfitting. Her subordination to male authority is thus a moral necessity, rooted in ontology—in the way God made man and woman to be from the beginning. Philosophically speaking, this is a hypothetical necessity, because it follows from a certain premise. *If* God created man to rule woman and woman to serve man, *then* a woman's submission to male authority obtains necessarily, solely by virtue of her womanhood. Her subordination is not contingent on her voluntarily taking on this "role."⁵¹

Functional subordination, on the other hand, is dependent on limited contexts or occasional conditions. A blind person submits to the authority of his seeing-eye dog in the context of negotiating a busy street. A student is subordinate to her teacher, given the student's inferior ability in the subject being taught. In these cases, subordination is limited in scope or duration because it is contingent on conditions that do not always and everywhere obtain. But because female subordination is necessary (context independent), it is both permanent (enduring throughout a woman's life) and comprehensive (including all that a woman does; in all things she must be submissive).⁵²

It should be evident from these observations that woman's subordination does not fit the definition of a "role." A role is a part that is played or a particular function or office that is assumed for a specific purpose or period of time. Anyone with the requisite abilities can play the part. By definition a role is not synonymous with or inexorably tied to who a person is. Yet the "roles" of male authority and female subordination are deemed essential to God's creational design for true manhood and womanhood. Indeed, Piper and Grudem state that their concern is not merely with "behavioral roles" but with the "true meaning" and "underlying nature of manhood and womanhood."⁵³

A woman can have many roles in life—teacher, office administrator, physician, writer—but none of these roles is seen as *essential* to true womanhood. That is because these roles are truly roles—chosen or appropriate for some women but not for others. Submission to male authority is the only "role" that is deemed essential for every woman who would be truly feminine and fulfill the purpose for which God created womanhood. That is because this "role" serves the role of constituting the meaning of femininity, of identifying a woman as a *real* woman. Female submission to male authority, then, is a "function" only in the sense that it is a *necessary* function of a woman's true being.

That submission is considered to be inherent in what a woman is by nature (and authority inherent in what a man is by nature) is evident in the patriarchalists' slippery-slope argument that egalitarianism leads logically to acceptance of homosexuality.⁵⁴ Their thinking is that once we say gender is irrelevant for deciding who is to have "primary leadership," the next "logical" step is to say the gender of one's marriage partner is also irrelevant. Just as a woman is meant to marry a man and not another woman, so a woman is meant to be submissive to a man and not to share authority equally with a man. Patriarchalists believe that gender differences in status and authority are as natural and essential to manhood and womanhood as is heterosexuality. To eliminate the former entails eliminating the latter, because it consists of eliminating what is inherent and universally normative in the gender distinction. The elimination of a mere role would not evoke such comparisons and predicted consequences.

It should also be noted that although role theology has become central to evangelical patriarchy, nowhere does Scripture use the term *role* or any synonym for it with reference to the responsibilities of believers toward God or one another. At no point do we read that God designed us—and requires us—to “play a role.” No, God’s concern is for each of us to *be* a righteous person and to use whatever gifts of the Spirit we have been given for the good of the church and the glory of God. The Bible’s focused exhortation is that we are *all* to be Christlike, to follow the example of Jesus’ earthly life—in humility, faithfulness, submission to God and spiritual authority (in Christ’s name) over all the powers of evil.

The consistency and clarity of this biblical message stands starkly against the notion that women do not have direct authority under God and so must submit spiritually to men, who are the primary wielders of spiritual authority in the body of Christ. This doctrine of spiritual inequality posing as “gender role difference” simply doesn’t fit with the Bible’s clear, core message.

When “Role” Plays the Role of “Being”

Regardless of how patriarchal gender relations may be explained or masculinity and femininity defined, the fact remains that woman’s subordinate “role” is determined exclusively and necessarily by her personal nature; that is, *solely* on account of her *being* female she *must* be subordinate. Therefore woman’s “role” designates not merely what she does (or doesn’t do) but what she is. She is female; she is subordinate.

It may sound quite plausible to insist that woman’s subordination and man’s authority are merely roles assigned by God and so do not entail woman’s personal inferiority. Roles, by definition, do not necessarily bespeak qualities of personal being. But patriarchal gender roles are not roles in accordance with the usual definition. These “roles” have a one-to-one correspondence with being. Where the “being” is, there the “role” is also. “Female being” corresponds precisely to “a role of subordination to male authority.” The word *role* is used in a way that renders its meaning basically synonymous, or redundant, with *being*.

Female subordination and male authority may be semantically reduced to “roles” or “functions,” but in reality they serve as modes of being—permanent personal identities, built into each one’s personal makeup by the Creator himself. Thus when the man rules and the woman obeys, each is only doing what each is inherently designed to do.

As a blind person is not fit to negotiate unfamiliar territory on his own, so a woman is not fit to preach God’s Word with authority or to discern God’s will for her own life apart from her husband’s spiritual authority over her. The female person and the blind person must each have someone do for them what they are not fit to do for themselves. However, the state of being blind does not bear the weight of ontological necessity or the implication of personal inferiority that woman’s subordination does. Under patriarchy, a woman’s deficiency in personal authority is regarded as ordained by God’s creational decree. But a blind person—even if blind from birth—is not deficient in sight by virtue of God’s creational design for humanity. His limitations are not intrinsic to and demanded by his essential, created nature. Nor are his limitations as deep or as wide as a woman’s. He is deprived of a physical function; he is not denied a spiritual ministry or the governance of his own life under God. Moreover, blindness is not necessarily a life sentence; it can sometimes be reversed.

Could it then be accurate to say that a blind person’s “role” is to be sightless? No, this is simply the way the person *is*; it is a mode of being, not a mode of behavior that is assumed for a specific purpose (as is a role). If a blind person’s lack of sight cannot rightly be described as a role that has no bearing on his state of being or personal ability, then (*a fortiori*) neither can woman’s creationally based lack of authority in key areas be accurately spoken of as a role that has no ontological entailment.

Thus the theoretical distinction between woman’s being and woman’s subordinate role evaporates under scrutiny. Woman’s lifelong subordination to man’s authority is not merely a role that is independent of and ontologically isolated from her being. Rather, the role is determined by the being and obtains solely because of the being. Where there is female being, there must of necessity be subordinate function. When one’s “role” is grounded in one’s essential being and obtains in all things and at all times, one’s “role” defines one’s personhood. Women are subordinate persons—by nature and definition. Their subordination is constitutive of and essential to their personhood.⁵⁵ But this is not ontological equality. Nor is it merely a matter of playing a role; rather, it is about *being* what one intrinsically *is* by virtue of the God-ordained nature and meaning of one’s sex.

The basis for women’s subordination (God’s design and purpose for womanhood), as well as the “functions” in which women are subordinate (spiritual discernment, decision making and self-governance), is all about being. Woman’s nature or ontology, her life purpose or teleology, her will, intellect and moral understanding, her spiritual responsibilities before God—these are matters as close to the heart of a person’s being as anything ever could be. They define and characterize what a person *is*. The suppression of women (and not men) in these critical areas of personhood is not meaningfully described merely as women’s “different role.”

The nature of and rationale for female subordination, then, make it fundamentally unlike functional subordination. Its nature (necessary, permanent and comprehensive) and its rationale (God’s creational design) place woman’s subordination foursquare in the realm of being. In woman’s “equal being and unequal role,” the “role” is as much about woman’s being as is the “equality.” Thus evangelical patriarchy does not have woman being unequal in a different respect from the way she is equal. Rather, a woman is unequal (subordinate) in the same respect that she is equal—by virtue of her being, as a constitutive element and necessary consequence of her being. Therefore woman’s equality (as biblically defined) and woman’s subordination (as defined by patriarchalists) cannot coexist without logical contradiction. Evangelical patriarchy’s *equal being/unequal role* construct must be deemed internally incoherent.

Part 2

“But It’s About God’s Will, Not Gender”

Defenders of the *equal being/unequal role* distinction may insist that female subordination does not imply woman’s inferiority because it is not determined by or grounded in a woman’s female nature; rather, it is determined by and grounded in God’s will alone. In other words, authority is not essential to manhood, nor is subordination essential to womanhood. Rather, women have a subordinate “role” and men have an authoritative “role” (or “office,” the term of choice for some). And women and men are assigned permanently to their “roles”

not because of their gender but simply because God, for reasons of his own, has commanded that women “function” in a “role” of subordination to men.⁵⁶

But if God has commanded subordination of all women and only women—such that femaleness is the necessary and sufficient criterion that decides a person’s permanent and comprehensive subordination—then God has indeed decreed a subordination that is determined by female gender. That is, God has set up an arrangement whereby the question “Who is to be in charge, and who is to be subordinate?” is answered solely according to gender.⁵⁷

A crucial point at issue here is whether God has in fact decreed such a thing. If God’s Word makes it clear that women are not ontologically inferior to men, and if—as has been argued above—the permanent, comprehensive and necessary subordination of women logically implies the ontological inferiority of the female gender, then we must conclude that God has *not* decreed such a thing and that biblical texts understood to convey such a decree have been wrongly interpreted.

Furthermore, the idea that woman’s subordination is not in any sense determined by or grounded in what a woman *is* or what God designed her to *be* is contrary to the ways of God in that it separates God’s will for creation from his design for creation. Ontology and teleology become detached, irrelevant to one another. In what other area of theology would this be asserted? Can the will of God be deemed to be at odds with the created nature of things? Would God require—has God ever required—of us anything for which he did not design us? God’s decrees always tell us something about his character, our humanity, the very nature of things the way God created them. For example, God’s ban on homosexual relationships tells us about—and is grounded in—the created nature of sexuality, its meaning, design and purpose. Surely if God has banned women from leadership in key areas and consigned women to be subordinate to male leadership, this tells us something about the created nature of womanhood and manhood.

The idea that what women may and may not do is ontologically disconnected from what women can and cannot do is also contrary to the whole tenor of New Testament teaching—that whatever one has been given one should use by investing it in and for the kingdom of God (e.g., 1 Pet 4:10–11). Being and function, fruit and gifts, personal character and public ministry are tandem expressions of faithful service and obedience to Christ. Biblically, one does not stop short of serving God’s people in a way for which one has been divinely gifted and prepared, any more than one takes on a ministry role that one is not personally or spiritually equipped to handle.

At least one patriarchalist has a clear view of the fallacy of using role language to describe what it means to be a man or a woman. German theologian Werner Neuer writes:

A person does not play the role of a man or a woman, but he is a man or she is a woman. Sex is no role, that can be changed at will like stage roles, but is a fundamental aspect of human existence from which no one can escape. It carries with it quite definite tasks and modes of conduct. And language must reflect this state of affairs. . . . Sex is concerned with being and not with roles. . . . In the cause of truth we should therefore give up talking about the roles of the sexes.⁵⁸

Neuer states the patriarchal position sans the role rhetoric: “The Christian view of the sexes starts from the premise that both men and women are in every respect God’s creatures and of equal value, but that in their *being* they are fundamentally distinct. Consequently they have different tasks to fulfill.”⁵⁹

That is, the different “functions” or “tasks” (male authority and female subordination) are grounded in and determined by the ontologically distinct male and female beings.

Indeed, it seems the typical patriarchal view is not just that God has *willed* that women and men have these “distinct functions” but that because God’s creational design is for women to be subordinate to men, these “roles” are in some sense uniquely fitting expressions of personal manhood and womanhood. God has designed men and women such that true femininity inclines toward submissiveness and true masculinity inclines toward personal, directive leadership.⁶⁰ Few patriarchalists today consistently claim or believe that submissiveness does not in some sense “fit” with the nature of womanhood, or that men are not by virtue of their manhood more suited to be in authority than are women.

What many patriarchalists actually believe about the being (and not merely the “function”) of women is reflected not only in their discussions of the subject but also in their day-to-day interactions with women and men in churches and Christian ministries. What, I wonder, would the church look like if people consistently believed—in both theory *and* practice—that superior male function does not bespeak superior male being (but only God’s apparently arbitrary will)? It is difficult to imagine, but it seems certain that women would not be treated the way they now are. If women were truly regarded as no less than men in their intrinsic capacities and inbuilt resources for leadership, decision making and spiritual understanding, then men in leadership would routinely utilize women’s abilities fully in such areas as financial and administrative management, ministry to both men and women, moral and theological reasoning, spiritual gifts and insights, and biblical exegesis and exposition. Furthermore, women would not be consistently interrupted, dismissed, patronized or ignored when they speak up in classrooms or staff/faculty/ board meetings of Christian organizations. Rather, men would listen to, respect, appreciate and seek out women’s counsel and expertise in all the areas where gifted women stand to contribute to the important tasks of shepherding God’s flock and sharing the gospel of Christ with the world at large.

People’s actual treatment of women often belies their professed belief that only the role is inferior, not the person. It is, after all, not possible to live out an implausible belief. Role theology would have us believe that although the subordinate role is not demanded by the nature of the female person, a woman who is truly feminine will play the role of submission to male authority because God ordained at creation that this is to be the woman’s permanent role, and only the woman who plays this role is fulfilling her purpose and true identity as a woman.

However, it is illogical to maintain that there is no basis for the role in the nature of the person when the role is one of moral necessity given the nature of the person, and when the role is perceived as defining one’s personal gender identity and as having been established by God at creation. In what other area of life do we freight a mere *role* with such ontological significance? Creational design, personal nature, gender identity—this is the stuff of *being*, not of a mere role or function. The concept of “role” is simply playing the role of “being”!

The logical connection between woman’s being and woman’s subordinate “role” is attested not only by common sense but also by common experience—an experience all too common for countless women who have followed God’s call into Christian ministry.

False Analogies

Many attempts to defend woman's subordination against the implication of woman's inferiority resort to some kind of argument by analogy: that is, if other instances of "role difference" are compatible with equality in being, then woman's subordination in "role" is compatible with her equality in being. But are such analogies valid, or are they comparing apples and oranges? We have already seen that not all differences in function or role logically permit personal equality. Many of these arguments attempt to justify woman's subordination (which is incompatible with personal equality) by likening it to a role that *is* compatible with personal equality. In order to refrain from falling into such logical errors, one must have a keen eye for the critical differences between female subordination and functional subordination. Subordination is necessarily personal and not merely functional when (as in female subordination) its scope is comprehensive, its duration is permanent, and the criterion for its determination is one's unalterable ontology.

One argument-by-analogy often put forth is that if a child's subordination to a parent does not imply the child's inferiority in being, then neither does a woman's subordination to her husband imply that the woman is inferior in being.⁶¹ But this is a classic case of false analogy. The child's subordination is *like* female subordination in that it is comprehensive and ontologically based; however, it is *unlike* female subordination in that its ontological basis—childhood—is a temporary condition. It is also unlike female subordination in that the child's parental governance follows justifiably from the child's lack of experience and inferior skills in decision making. The child's subordination ends when its purpose has been accomplished and the child is sufficiently mature to make independent decisions.

Because the nature of childhood warrants the child's subordination, and childhood is a temporary condition that all humans undergo, the subordination of child to parent does not imply the child's inferiority in fundamental personhood. The child, for that matter, could grow up to hold a position of authority over her own parents. (A woman can never "grow up" to have authority over—or even equal with—a man.) Of course, the grown child will still owe respect and honor to her parents as a permanent obligation. However, the point at issue is not whether a woman should respect and honor her husband (as she certainly should) but whether she should submit to his rule.

Space does not permit a response to all such spurious arguments-by-analogy.⁶² The rest of this chapter will address two key theological analogies that are often advanced in order to justify woman's subordination.

The Priests and the Levites

Some have argued that because God assigned the Levites, especially those in the Aaronic priesthood, to a special religious function from which other Israelites were excluded, this shows, by analogy, that the doctrine of male authority in marriage and ministry does not violate the essential equality of women and men.⁶³ This argument is flawed both analogically and theologically.

It is true that each arrangement grants to some people a religious status that is denied to others, based entirely on physical attributes of birth. However, the analogy fails at several key points. Unlike male authority and female subordination, the special role of the Levites did not meet all the characteristics of criteria, duration and scope, which together render a superior-subordinate order fundamentally ontological rather than merely functional.⁶⁴

Although the Levitical priesthood is roughly analogous to male authority in terms of its lifelong duration and its basis in unalterable physical being, its scope is a different matter. The scope of female subordination to male authority is comprehensive. A married woman is subject to her husband's authority in every area of her life. There is no area in which a woman has any authority, privilege or opportunity that a man is denied.⁶⁵ The male is consistently advantaged with respect to the female, and the female is consistently disadvantaged with respect to the male. The Levites, however, were not consistently advantaged with respect to the people; they were denied the right of the other tribes to own and inherit land (Num 18:20). In patriarchal agrarian societies, land ownership was deemed supremely desirable and a mark of social status—a right generally denied the less privileged classes (such as women and slaves). It was also denied the Levites. Thus there remained a sense of equality or parity between the Levites and the other Israelites in that each group had its own advantages and disadvantages.

Furthermore, while God chose the Levites to perform a ministry of lifelong duration, it was not a permanent decree as is the (supposed) divine decree that women be subordinate to male authority. The authority/status difference between women and men is deemed an essential feature of God's creational design; thus it is permanent not only in the sense that it endures throughout a person's lifetime but also in that it pertains to all men and women everywhere for all time. The Levites' role, by contrast, was not permanent but provisional, in that it pertained only to a temporary religious system at a particular time and for a particular purpose in history.

It should also be noted that men in the Levitical priesthood did not have the sort of spiritual authority over the people that men today are given over women in the church and home. In the Old Testament, spiritual authority in this sense—whereby certain individuals spoke for God and made the will of God known to others—was exercised less by the priests than by the prophets (among whom were women).

Moreover, there was a discernible purpose and reason for God's choosing the Levites for a special spiritual status. Intrinsic to God's rationale was the fact that this arrangement was *not* permanent or inherent in creational design but served a specific and limited function until the new covenant in Christ. The Bible characteristically does not reveal God's universal commands without also revealing the moral or theological reasons for the commands. Yet there is no discernible reason why God would have chosen men for permanently superior spiritual status. The only possible *logical* rationale would be that all men are spiritually superior to all women—a supposition for which no evidence exists, and which today's proponents of male authority deny.

God chose the Levites to serve on behalf of all the firstborn sons of Israel, who by right belonged to Yahweh. In lieu of demanding the firstborn of every family, God set aside the Levites as his own (Num 3:11–13, 40–51). In this sense the Levites were playing a role. It was for symbolic, illustrative and instructional purposes that God formally consecrated the priests and Levites for their special role of representing God's holiness to the people and representing Israel before God (Num 8). The Levitical priesthood was justified during the time of the old covenant, because God had ordained that certain individuals who possessed physical attributes and pedigrees deemed worthy by human standards should serve as an object lesson for the people, a visible picture of an invisible God who is utterly perfect and supremely worthy.⁶⁶ Furthermore, God's ultimate covenant purpose was for *all* his people to serve as his priesthood (Ex 19:6; Is 61:6). The representative ministry of the Levitical priesthood prevailed

only until the new covenant instituted the high priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all believers.

Everything that was prefigured in the Levitical priesthood has now been fulfilled forever in Jesus Christ, who is the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), the one Mediator between God and humans (1 Tim 2:5) and our high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, which supersedes the order of Aaron (Heb 6:19–20; 7:11–28). The perfect representation of God has now been given once and for all in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Jn 14:9; Col 1:15, 19; Heb 1:3), and this leaves no room for addition, development or duplication in the form of men who believe they stand in the authority of Christ vis-à-vis women.

In the new covenant, physical distinctions such as race and gender no longer demarcate unequal levels of religious privilege (Gal 3:26–28). No one in the body of Christ is excluded from the priestly responsibilities of representing God's holiness to the world, offering spiritual sacrifices to God, representing God before other believers and interceding for others before God. The failure to perceive and honor the pivotal difference between priesthood in the old covenant and priesthood in the new covenant is a fundamental theological flaw of evangelical patriarchy.⁶⁷ This point of confusion is reflected in the attempt to defend a special spiritual status for Christian men by comparing it to the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant.

The Subordination of the Son to the Father

Support for the claim that woman's unequal role does not bespeak woman's unequal being is often sought in the analogy of the relationship of God the Son to God the Father.⁶⁸ It is argued that the Father and the Son are "equal in being" yet in all things and through all eternity they relate to one another according to a hierarchy of authority and obedience; thus the analogy of the "eternal functional subordination" within the Trinity illustrates and vindicates woman's permanent and comprehensive subordination to man's authority. As with the Levitical argument, I believe the trinitarian argument fails to hold up either analogically or theologically.

False analogy. Christian orthodoxy affirms that God and Christ are of the same substance and nature; they are not just equal in being but one in being. There is no difference between the divine nature of the Father and the divine nature of the Son.⁶⁹ Thus human nature is not analogous to divine nature. God (three Persons sharing one divine nature) is a unitary being, while humanity (billions of persons sharing human nature) is a category consisting of a multiplicity of beings. There is a oneness in nature/essence/substance between the Father and the Son that is absent from any male-female relationship.

Therefore any subordination of Christ to God would necessarily be fundamentally dissimilar to the subordination of woman to man, which is decided by and deemed essential to the "deeper differences" of manhood and womanhood. Unlike woman's subordination to man, the Son's subordination to the Father cannot be grounded in or determined by his "different" nature. Although subordinationists consider Christ's eternal subordination to be an inherent, unchanging element of the Godhead, it evidently obtains by virtue of Christ's relationship as Son to the Father, not by virtue of his nature being different from the Father's. (Yet here, too, they assume a false analogy. A son is not permanently subordinate in all things to his father.)

It has often been stated that one purpose of male leadership in marriage is to determine who makes the decision when husband and wife cannot agree. The properly submissive wife will act against her own best judgment if the husband's "final decision" is contrary

to her will. But the members of the Trinity are always completely one in will.⁷⁰ Unlike the subordination prescribed for women, there could be no subordination in the eternal Trinity that would involve one divine Person acting against his own preference or best judgment under orders issued from the contrary will of another divine Person. When the Father sent the Son, it was not along the lines of an earthly father who says, "Well, son, here's what I'm going to have you do," at which point the son learns what he had better do or else. Rather, with Father, Son and Holy Spirit of one mind on how to redeem sinful humans (as they always are on every matter), it was the Son's will to go as much as it was the Father's will to send him (Phil 2:5–11).

Moreover, in Christ's own description of his earthly ministry, he states that the Father has given him all judgment and authority (Mt 28:18; Jn 5:21–27; 17:2).⁷¹ Even during his earthly incarnation, when Jesus did only the Father's will (Jn 5:30; 8:28–29), the relationship of Father and Son was not at all like that of husband and wife in a patriarchal marriage, where the husband holds final decision-making authority and is neither expected nor required to share this authority with his wife.

Even if there were an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, it would fail to model the key elements of woman's lifelong subordination to man. What would female subordination to male authority look like if it were truly analogous to a subordination of the Son to the Father? First, the authority of the man and the submission of the woman would not be decided or demanded by their different male and female natures. Second, there would never be an occasion in which the man's will would or should overrule the woman's will; the man therefore would "send" the woman to do only what was in accordance with her own will. Third, every husband would willingly and consistently share all authority with his wife, acknowledging her full authority to make judgments and decisions on behalf of both of them. In short, the oneness in being of the divine Persons, which results in oneness of will, precludes invoking the Trinity as either illustrating or vindicating the doctrine of woman's subordination to man.

Theological problems. The oneness in nature and will of the divine Persons not only renders any "eternal functional subordination of the Son" disanalogous to female subordination but also brings into question the logical coherence of the doctrine itself. What could be the logic of one person always functioning subject to the authority of another person without some cause or ground for this continuous subordination in the respective natures of the two persons? And how could there be a permanent, unilateral "order" of authority and obedience between persons who are always of one mind and will, who have the same perfect knowledge and understanding, the same perfectly righteous desires, the same infinite and inexhaustible wisdom and love? How could there even be any sense or purpose in such an arrangement?

Philippians 2:5–11 states that during his time on earth in human flesh, Jesus put human limitations on his equality with God by choosing to take on the role of a servant. He "became obedient" (Phil 2:8 NRSV). The time of Christ's earthly incarnation was not business as usual for God the Son and God the Father; it was an epic—although temporally limited—change in their relationship. Hebrews 5:7–8 states, "Son though he was, he learned obedience" while he was on earth in the flesh, and God heard his prayers "because of his reverent submission." Since this was the first time the Son needed to be obedient to the Father, he had to learn how to do it. It was not until his earthly incarnation that the Son "*became*

obedient” and “learned obedience.” There is no indication of an *eternal* order of the Son’s obedience to the Father’s authority.⁷²

Furthermore, when Christ humbled himself to become human in order to redeem fallen humanity, it was not so much a demonstration of the Son’s submission to the Father as a demonstration of the nature and being of the Father. As F. F. Bruce notes, “Nowhere is God more fully or worthily revealed as God than when we see him ‘in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor 5:19).”⁷³

In the incarnation, the Son became functionally subordinate to the Father only with respect to his work as our Redeemer. Thus Christ’s subordination is limited in both scope and duration, since the work of redemption has a beginning and end point in time. But if, as patriarchalists typically argue, Christ’s subordination is not limited temporally and functionally but pertains in all things throughout all eternity, then it is not a functional subordination; it is a personal subordination. Subordinate is what he always is, what he always has been, what he always will be; it necessarily defines and characterizes the person and identity of the Son throughout all eternity.

The idea that Christ’s subordination is eternal yet merely functional (and thereby compatible with ontological equality) is incongruent. An eternal subordination of Christ would seem logically to entail his ontological subordination.⁷⁴ As Millard Erickson concludes, “A temporal, functional subordination without inferiority of essence seems possible, but not an eternal subordination.”⁷⁵

The doctrine of an eternal “role” subordination of the Son to the Father not only is rife with logical and theological difficulties but utterly fails as an analogy to woman’s subordination. Thus it serves neither to illustrate nor to vindicate the claim that woman’s subordination and woman’s equality can coexist without contradiction.⁷⁶

In Conclusion

Whether within a marriage or within the Trinity, subordination is not functional but ontological when it defines and characterizes a person in all his or her aspects, in perpetuity—when subordination is thereby inherent in the very identity of a person. To attempt to legitimize such subordination by declaring it to be a “role” that has no bearing on the “equality in being” of the subordinated person is a rhetorical sleight of hand. Saying it doesn’t make it so—or even logically possible.

Truly functional subordination *can* logically coexist with equality of being. However, neither female subordination nor an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father fits the definition of functional subordination. Female subordination is not about performing a function as much as it is about being—*being* female, *being* submissive to male authority. Because women’s subordination is not merely a function or a role but is fundamentally ontological, it contradicts the biblical teaching of the essential equality of women and men. Similarly, any eternal subordination of the Son would seem logically to entail the Son’s ontologically inferior status and so to contradict biblical teaching on the oneness of God and the absolute equality in being of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Woman’s inferior “role” cannot be defended by the claim that it is ontologically distinct from woman’s equal being. In female subordination, being determines role and role defines being; thus there can be no real distinction between the two. If the one is inferior, so must be the other. If, on the other hand, woman is *not* less than

man in her personal being, then neither can there be any biblical or theological warrant for woman’s permanent, comprehensive and ontologically grounded subordination to man’s authority.⁷⁷

NOTES

(References to “this volume” refer to *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Please see that volume for a list of abbreviations used below.)

1. Aristotle *Politics* 1259.b.3.
2. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *RBMW*, pp. 60, 87.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79; and John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in *RBMW*, pp. 35–52.
4. In this essay the *nature* of a thing is understood to mean its inherent character, intended purpose, defining qualities, essence or being.
5. In *The Less Noble Sex* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), Nancy Tuana develops the thesis that “Aristotle’s conception of [woman as] the misbegotten man held sway in science, philosophy, and theology at least until the nineteenth century” (p. ix).
6. Aristotle *Politics* 1254.b.10.
7. I will refer to nonegalitarian evangelicals as *patriarchalists* or in some cases *subordinationists*, since these terms identify most clearly the key concepts—male rule and female subordination—that distinguish this view from that of evangelical egalitarians. For the use of the term *patriarchy* to identify the doctrine of male leadership, see Steven Tracy, “Headship with a Heart: How Biblical Patriarchy Actually Prevents Abuse,” *Christianity Today*, February 2003, pp. 50–54. Tracy defines patriarchy as “the affirmation of male authority over females,” which is the sense in which I use it here. The issue at stake in this debate is precisely the concept of patriarchy—and not of hierarchy or tradition or complementarity (all legitimate concepts in themselves). For further discussion of the terminology issue, see the introduction to this volume.
8. Piper and Grudem, “Overview,” p. 87. Conversely, they feel dismayed that “‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood’ as such are now often seen as irrelevant factors in determining fitness for leadership” (p. xiii).
9. Piper, “Vision,” p. 34, emphasis added.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.
11. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “Preface,” in *RBMW*, p. xiv.
12. Aristotle *Metaphysics* Gamma 3.1005b.
13. See Ronald H. Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 194–201, 207.
14. The material in this chapter will build on and develop ideas presented in Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), especially pp. 27–83. Hereafter *GNFW*.
15. Less compelling counterarguments will be addressed in footnotes in part one.
16. See chapters four through twenty-two in this volume; see also *GNFW*, especially chaps. 1, 4–8.
17. Nineteenth-century American feminists believed women’s rights were simply the basic human rights applied equally to women. (See chapter twenty-four in this volume for discussion of early feminist thought.) In the feminist and broader cultural ideologies of recent decades, the notion of “rights” has often been abused and overextended. This is not the sense in which I speak of “rights” here. Claiming one’s right to something is not, in itself, an unbiblical concept. Paul, for example, occasionally spoke of having rights, such as the right to receive recompense for his labor or to take “a believing wife” along with him in Christian ministry (1 Cor 9:4–12). Another example is the Syrochenean woman who argued her case with Jesus, claiming (in essence) her right to ask for healing for her daughter. Jesus applauded her response and granted her request (Mk 7:24–30).
18. Some seem to have missed this point entirely, insisting—evidently on the basis of a similarity between the equality of biblical egalitarianism and the equality of classical liberalism—that biblical egalitarianism is invalid because it is not grounded primarily in Scripture but is dependent on extrabiblical political premises. See, for example, Thomas R. Schreiner, review of *Good News for Women*, *Themelios* 23, no. 1: 89–90; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 187 n. 16, 200; and Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 33, 277, 281, 291 n. 16. Both Schreiner and Sumner misconstrue my remarks in *GNFW*, pp. 46–47, where I simply describe the classical liberal understanding of equality (which nineteenth-century feminists

put into practice) and note that this understanding of equality is the logical and ethically consistent outworking of fundamental biblical principles. Thus the political philosophy serves as an illustration of—not a justification for—the sort of equality that is most consistent with the tenets of Scripture. At no point is biblical gender equality grounded in or morally justified on the basis of classical liberalism or feminism. For a historical and cultural analysis of the relationship between biblical equality and feminism, see Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994; reprint Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1997).

19. More on this below.

20. A sexual role has to do with sexual functions (marriage, parenthood, etc.). Ministries such as teaching the Bible and shepherding a church are not sexual functions.

21. See *GNFW*, pp. 45–49, where different kinds of equality are explained and delineated.

22. At least some angels are probably also endowed with such capabilities, but the comparison here is with earthly creatures. Some animals may have some rational function but certainly not at the level of which humans are capable.

23. Of course some individuals, male or female, will be less gifted in certain distinctively human activities than other individuals, whether by difference in training or innate ability. But this is a matter of variation between individuals; the point at issue here is variation between womanhood and manhood. That is, is being female in and of itself sufficient to render a person inferior, or likely to be inferior, in uniquely human capacities?

24. The question of women's inherent ability to perform these tasks can elicit considerable equivocation among patriarchalists. The historically traditional view—based (erroneously) on 1 Timothy 2:14—is that women are constitutionally unfit for leadership because they are more easily deceived. This rationale for women's subordination is largely rejected today; but see Thomas Schreiner and Daniel Doriani, who have proposed a rationale similar to the traditional one, in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 145–46, 262–67. (For a response to their view, see Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “Leading Him up the Garden Path: Further Thoughts on 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” *Priscilla Papers*, Spring 2002, pp. 11–12.) More recently, Robert Saucy also offers an ontological basis for male leadership when he suggests that the implications of the difference in “spirit” between maleness and femaleness (a notion he takes from M. Scott Peck) could provide a rationale for women's subordination to men. Robert L. Saucy, “The ‘Order’ and ‘Equality’ of Galatians 3:28,” in *Women and Men in Ministry*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), p. 154.

25. If this analogy seems a bit strong, it should be noted that Piper and Grudem (“Overview,” p. 87) draw a comparison between the woman and the animals in Genesis 2, arguing that just as the animals were to be submissive to the man, so was the woman.

26. Raymond C. Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *RBMW*, p. 102.

27. The Fall did not normatively change the male-female equality established at creation; see *GNFW*, chap. 5. See also chapter four in this volume.

28. Individuals (both male and female) will, of course, have different kinds of relationships with God. But these differences will be due to a host of factors relating to the unique circumstances of each person; they will not be strictly on account of gender.

29. Piper, “Vision,” p. 50.

30. See Wayne Grudem, “Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1–7,” in *RBMW*, p. 207. However, the wife is exempted from obeying a decision that is overtly immoral.

31. George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” in *RBMW*, p. 174.

32. However, a fair description of the situation in the New Testament church would be spiritual equality with social inequality (due to the cultural patriarchy of ancient times). Nothing in the New Testament stipulates that a man must have authority over and responsibility for his wife's spiritual condition, as many patriarchalists today advocate. The apostle Peter commended Christian women who refused to submit to their husbands' false religious beliefs, yet urged these women to be submissive to the social roles of the time (1 Pet 3:1–6). Evangelical patriarchalists today actually invert the New Testament situation by advocating, in essence, an inequality in spiritual rights and responsibilities for women in a cultural context in which women generally experience equality in social rights and responsibilities. See *GNFW*, pp. 36–39. See also chapter ten in this volume.

33. Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality,” p. 482 n. 50.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

35. Knight, “Husbands and Wives,” p. 174.

36. Piper, “Vision,” p. 38. This is qualified by the comment that a husband “must not be Christ to his wife.”

37. *Ibid.*, and Piper and Grudem, “Overview,” *RBMW*, p. 64.

38. Piper, “Vision,” p. 37.

39. Some go even further, proclaiming “the husband as prophet, priest and king.” See the workshop by this title at the conference cosponsored by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood held March 20–22, 2000, in Dallas.

40. There is no implication in the text that the husband has spiritual authority over his wife, although the husband's civil authority was assumed, given the culture of Paul's day. On the “head” metaphor, see chapter eight in this volume.

41. See *GNFW*, pp. 152–55, 164–70, 180–82, 101–4; and Payne, “Response,” 121–4.

42. See discussion of Galatians 3:28 in *GNFW*, chap. 1.

43. The spiritual authority that patriarchalists reserve exclusively for male believers actually goes beyond the biblical ministry of all believers in that the man's priestlike spiritual authority encroaches upon the unique mediatorial ministry of Christ. See *GNFW*, pp. 115–17.

44. There has been persistent misrepresentation and misunderstanding on this matter. Schreiner, for example, asserts that “the basic point of Rebecca Merrill Groothuis's *Good News for Women* is that one cannot logically posit both equality of personhood and differences in role” (Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” p. 200). In fact, I affirm quite the opposite of this “basic point.” See *GNFW*, pp. 49–52, where I show that many types of role differences are compatible with personal equality.

45. Agnieszka Tennant, “Adam and Eve in the 21st Century,” *Christianity Today*, March 11, 2002, p. 61.

46. This will be argued below. Also, see *GNFW*, pp. 49–56, 60–63.

47. On rhetorical strategies of patriarchalists, see Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “Strange Bedfellows,” *Priscilla Papers*, Fall 2000; see also Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 187–90.

48. See *GNFW*, pp. 50–51. For an example of functional subordination with limited duration and unlimited scope, see section below entitled “False Analogies.”

49. See *GNFW*, pp. 44–45, 49–56, 60–63, 74–77, for further explanation of these issues. Robert Saucy (“‘Order’ and ‘Equality,’” pp. 153–54) tries to debunk my claim that woman's permanent subordination implies woman's inferiority by arguing that if woman is rendered unequal because her subordination is permanent, then the mere passing of time must make a person unequal (which is nonsensical). However, I do not say that permanent subordination necessarily implies personal inequality. The issue is not simply permanence but whether the subordination is truly functional. Subordination can allow for equality of personhood only if it is a functional subordination—which female subordination is not; moreover, it is possible for functional subordination to be permanent (see *GNFW*, pp. 50, 74–75). Saucy (“‘Order’ and ‘Equality,’” p. 154) appears to attempt another *reductio ad absurdum* argument when he claims that I say subordination renders a person inferior only if the subordination is not based on inferior abilities (also nonsensical). But my point is not that female subordination actually renders women inferior but that it logically implies women's inferiority, and that women's subordination is unjustified precisely because women are not inferior to men in leadership ability.

50. Some patriarchalists believe the “pattern of male leadership” extends throughout the next life as well. See, for example, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), p. 940.

51. Saucy objects to my depiction of woman's subordination as necessary and not voluntary, insisting that it is indeed voluntary because nobody can force a woman to submit to her husband's authority (Saucy, “‘Order’ and ‘Equality,’” pp. 157–58). But this seems to equivocate on the meaning of voluntary. Normally an act is considered voluntary if one can choose either to do or not to do it without censure. But when something is the law—whether civil law or God's law—those who are under the law are obligated to obey it, and disobedience incurs some form of censure. (Referring to the biblical “command” for wives to submit, Grudem [“Wives Like Sarah,” p. 207] notes that “submission to one's husband is not optional for Christian wives.”) Even more to the point, woman's subordination is grounded in her female being, not in her will. The rationale for women's subordination is not that they choose of their own volition to be subordinate but that they are created to be subordinate.

52. Some milder forms of patriarchy today allow women to have authority over men so long as it is not “final authority” or spiritual authority. Nonetheless, a married woman must be submissive to her husband's authority in every area of her life.

53. Piper and Grudem, “Overview,” p. 60.

54. See *ibid.*, pp. 82–84 and 85–87.

55. See the excellent discussion of “role difference” in Giles, *Trinity and Subordinationism*, pp. 179–88.

56. Sarah Sumner offers an argument to this effect in *Men and Women in the Church*, p. 278. She calls this the “Scotist” view—that we cannot, nor need we, understand the reasons for God's commands. She claims Piper and Grudem hold

this view; yet these men affirm that the nature, meaning and deeper differences of manhood and womanhood are relevant to deciding who submits and who has authority, thus affirming an ontological basis for gender “roles.” But perhaps the Scotist perspective often serves more as an ad hoc argumentative strategy than as a principled conviction.

57. This is precisely the case in determining authority in marriages. For church leadership, maleness is necessary but (unlike male rule in marriage) not sufficient; other qualifications must be met as well.

58. Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), pp. 29–30.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 23, emphasis added. Neuer apparently does not acknowledge that such a difference or inequality in being implies women’s inferiority in being.

60. As noted earlier in this chapter, this is the view of Piper and Grudem, who are representative of many, especially those of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

61. Ortlund argues along these lines in “Male-Female Equality,” p. 104.

62. See *GNFW*, pp. 49–52, 60–63, for additional examples and discussion.

63. See, for example, James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 44–45; and Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” p. 201.

64. See previous section “Difference in ‘Role’ or ‘Function’”; see also chart in *GNFW*, p. 45.

65. As noted in the “Equality in Being” section above, this is not effectively countered by the claim that there is functional parity between male and female because only women can have babies.

66. See *GNFW*, pp. 31–36.

67. See *GNFW*, chaps. 1 and 4, especially pp. 31–36, 115–17. See also chapters ten and sixteen in this volume.

68. See, for example, Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 459–60.

69. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1985), pp. 337, 339.

70. Although Paul exhorts believers to be of one mind (Phil 2:2), this refers to unity and harmony in relationships, not to the complete and consistent oneness in will and desire that characterize the members of the Trinity.

71. Patriarchalist Steven Tracy acknowledges this aspect of the Father-Son analogy and says this should challenge men to “exercise biblical headship by giving women authority in various spheres of life and ministry.” Males, however, must still retain “final decision-making authority” over females (Tracy, “Headship with a Heart,” p. 53). This sort of arrangement, however, falls short of the analogy of the Father’s giving “all judgment” to the Son. Note also that even in Tracy’s benevolent construal of patriarchy, the woman has no direct authority under God; she has only the authority her husband decides to give her.

72. See Gilbert Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping,” *JETS* 40, no. 1 (March 1997): 65.

73. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 80.

74. Those who affirm the Son’s “eternal functional subordination” deny that the Son’s subordination is ontological. Thus my argument is not that these proponents of trinitarian subordination are heretical but that they fail to acknowledge this theological and philosophical entailment of their position. Robert Letham’s ruminations illustrate how the notion of eternal functional subordination collapses into ontological subordination. See Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate,” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 67–68. For a response, see *GNFW*, pp. 57–58.

75. Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), p. 309.

76. See chapter nineteen in this volume for a more detailed theological critique of the doctrine of Christ’s subordination.

77. I am grateful to Douglas Groothuis and a half-dozen other writers and scholars who critiqued earlier versions of this chapter.



Rebecca Merrill Groothuis has lectured at Denver Seminary, Fuller Seminary, and at a national meeting of the Evangelical Press Association. She also serves on the Christians for Biblical Equality Board of Reference. Rebecca’s publications include the award-winning *Women Caught in the Conflict* and *Good News for Women*. She also co-edited *Discovering Biblical Equality* with Ron Pierce and Gordon Fee. Rebecca lives with her husband Doug in the Denver area.



Join CBE International and CBE–South Africa for a conference focused on ending gender-based violence.

**September 16–17, 2016
Johannesburg, South Africa**

Save the dates! More coming soon!

For more information, visit cbe.today/2016conference or email conferences@cbeinternational.org

Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage:

Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33

I. Howard Marshall

This article is taken from *Discovering Biblical Equality* edited by Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee. Copyright (c) Second Edition, by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, USA. www.ivpress.com.

Colossians and Ephesians both have a fairly clear division between the doctrinal and the practical. Colossians 3–4 expounds the conduct expected of those who have been “raised with Christ,” and Ephesians 4–6 describes the “life worthy of the calling you have received” (Eph 4:1). Both conclude by addressing each of the two parties in the three main relationships in the ancient household: wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters (Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–6:9). In all cases Paul is dealing with Christian behavior, emphasizing both what is expected of Christians in their life “in the Lord” and what they are capable of doing through the power of the Spirit in their risen life with Christ. We shall place the two passages in their context and then consider each in turn.

The Household Tables and Their Interpretation Today

Greco-Roman “household tables” offer no precise parallels to the New Testament material, although the general pattern of giving teachings structured according to household roles, addressed to the same three pairs of people and inculcating reciprocal duties, can be traced back to Aristotle.¹ The teaching requires wives, children and slaves to be submissive to, or to obey, husbands, parents and masters respectively; the latter are essentially told not to abuse their position of authority.

In Colossians, social duties appropriate in the first-century context are given a Christian motivation.² The Christocentricity of the teaching to wives, children and slaves is notable (seven of the fourteen references to “the Lord” in Colossians appear in these nine verses). The behavior of husbands and fathers is motivated more pragmatically, although masters are reminded that they are answerable to their heavenly Lord. Their position of authority is simply assumed, because it was authorized by Roman law and social custom.³ Thus they are not instructed to exercise authority; rather in so doing they are to show love⁴ and not to treat wives harshly, to refrain from provoking children and to treat slaves justly and fairly.

Ephesians gives a considerably expanded form of the same teaching, with fuller biblical and theological backing. Wives are to be submissive to their husbands in the same way as the church is submissive to Christ; an analogy is drawn between the relation of the husband as head to the wife and the relation of Christ as head (and savior) to the church. The very brief “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” in Colossians is expanded by an analogy with the love of Christ for the church, expressed in his self-giving for the church so as to sanctify it. Paul draws on the body metaphor already used in Ephesians 5:23 and develops it in a fresh way: as Christ loves his body, the church, so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. A concluding summary reminds the husband to love his wife and the wife to respect her husband.

There is a concealed hermeneutical trap for readers of this instruction. Since much of it can be seen as still appropriate in the modern world, it is tempting to assume that whatever Paul says here should be applied without significant modification to our situation. In fact, adjustment to changed circumstances is required, as can be seen by a consideration of the material about children and slaves.

Children and parents. The instructions to parents and children appear to be commonsensical and Christian. The only practical way for responsible parents to cope with some of the problems of children as they progress through childhood and adolescence to adulthood and independence is to expect obedience; young children must do what parents require without always understanding why it makes sense to do it. They must also do what parents want rather than what they want where there is a clash of interests.

Nevertheless, despite the appearance of following the letter of Scripture on this matter, we do in fact behave somewhat differently. One important question concerns the age at which children cease to be under the strict authority of their parents. In the modern world there is an ill-defined “coming of age” at which this happens. But in the ancient world this subordination continued to a more advanced age than would be natural for us. Today we would regard it as essential to teach children to develop independence of their parents and learn to make their own decisions wisely and “in the Lord.”

Further, the father as patriarch had a much greater authority over sons and daughters than is the case today. A modern son or daughter can claim independence of parents in a way that is not contemplated in Paul’s commandment, understood in its contemporary social setting.⁵

Most significant, there is no mention here of love between parents and children.

Slaves and masters. The instructions to slaves and masters similarly contain advice that could well be given to modern employees and employers or managers. Justice, fairness and avoidance of violence are self-evidently right. Doing one’s work well and putting it in the context of work done for the Lord is appropriate whether one is working under contract for a wage or fee or working for a slave owner.

In this case, however, there is an even clearer shift in the modern setup. The way authority over workers is exercised was radically altered in the shift from slavery to employment. There are limits to the authority of employers and managers and to the ways their authority may be exercised. Strict legal codes must be observed, whereas the ancient slavemaster was in many (but not all) respects a law to himself.

There is also the development of trade unions and industrial tribunals; these institutions are not provided for or foreseen in the New Testament but are appropriate and necessary ways of

settling disputes and safeguarding rights. A blanket command to “obey your earthly masters in everything” is emphatically not the complete solution to employment problems, even if it is balanced by “provide your slaves with what is right and fair.” Something more is needed, in order that the meaning of “right and fair” may be correctly spelled out and so that proper practices may be enforced on sinful employers. Christians today would feel it a part of their Christian duty to help set up arbitration and conciliation procedures and to take part in them.

Behind these changes lies a significant shift in the status of workers which is not spelled out in the New Testament.⁶ Today Christian theologians recognize that slavery is not an acceptable form of relationship; it is rejected on the basis of larger biblical considerations having to do with the facts that all human beings are created in the image of God and that all human beings are potentially objects of redemption since Christ died for all.⁷ All human beings may be regarded as brothers and sisters one to another, a relationship that is actualized (however imperfectly it may be realized) in the church and is potential for those outside the church. Such brotherhood clearly allows for contractual obligations being drawn up where one brother or sister may employ another, but it excludes the absolute power of one brother or sister over another that occurs in slavery.

Consequently, what is said here about masters and slaves is not the last word on the matter. A modern system of industrial relationships must draw its principles and practice from a wider consideration of scriptural teaching than simply these two (and other related) passages. The abolition of slavery has radically altered the way employment relationships are expressed; thus while the spirit of the instructions here can inspire our relationships, the actual practice of them will be very different.

Subjects and rulers. In related teaching in Romans, 1 Peter and elsewhere, people are commanded to obey their rulers as those authorized by God himself to rule in human society. This teaching presupposes what was in fact the normal situation for most people in New Testament times, the existence of an imposed monarchical or aristocratic system of one kind or another.⁸ The New Testament teaching recognizes the realities of this situation and urges people to behave appropriately as obedient citizens: granted that the system may not be ideal and cannot be changed, make the best of it, and commend the gospel by the way you behave in fulfilling the obligations laid upon you.

However, most (Westernized) countries today have political systems in which, within the structures of democracy, we can vote out our rulers if they turn out to be incompetent or unjust or even if we simply want to see a change of personnel. In these new situations we put the New Testament passages about political subordination and obedience into a wider perspective and recognize that the key elements in Romans 13 and elsewhere may be expressed differently in the different conditions that now exist, and that political thinking can go beyond the parameters that appear to exist there.

Implications. These three examples have shown that the specific biblical teaching about behavior in these relationships contains much that can and should be practiced in the very different situations of today, where strict parental authority is limited to younger children,⁹ there is no slavery, and democracy has replaced dictatorship. Yet we have also seen that (1) we modify in practice the specific ways we follow out the principles in the teaching; (2) important aspects of behavior within the relationships are

not discussed here or elsewhere in specific terms in Scripture; (3) the social structures assumed in these teachings may need to be changed and replaced by something different.

In short, these passages do not tell the whole story about these sets of relationships; they deal purely with limited aspects of them. In the cases of the family, employment and politics, Paul assumes the existence of particular structures. But these structures are not sacrosanct, and few would doubt that the changes to them have on the whole been for the better. More important, absolutism and slavery are now recognized to be forms of power/authority that sit uncomfortably with biblical teaching; and total authority of parents over older children would not be acceptable to Christians today. In all three cases we live within different structures and recognize a need for change from the first-century structures as a result of our continuing evaluation of society in the light of the gospel. With changes in structures and relationships, there naturally come changes in the kinds of behavior required of Christians in them. It would be very strange if similar considerations did not apply in the case of marriage.

Wives and Husbands in Colossians

At first sight there is no problem in applying to modern readers the injunction to husbands to love their wives and not to treat them harshly.¹⁰ But what about the requirement that wives be “submissive” to their husbands? Significantly, the term *obey* (used for children and slaves) is not used here; nevertheless, for Paul’s audience there may not have been a lot of difference in practice between being submissive and being obedient.¹¹ The statement is “christianized” by the comment that this “is fitting in the Lord.” In other words, this command flows out of the situation in which Christians stand under the authority of Christ as Lord and follow out his commands.¹² It is thus like the statements about subjection to the state (although, as we have seen, they do not necessarily legitimate absolute despotism as the only form of rule appropriate in the modern world).

The marital setup in the various societies in the ancient world was complex, and it is dangerous to generalize. There was certainly a tendency for a wife to be understood as her husband’s “chattel,” his possession, although this term was not actually used.¹³ For example, a Jewish wife was guilty of adultery against her husband if she allowed another man to usurp her husband’s marital rights over her, but if a husband had sexual relations with another woman he was not guilty of adultery against his wife. This one-sidedness arose because the wife was thought of as her husband’s possession.

Jesus radically overturned this situation by his declaration that a husband who has relations with another woman commits adultery *against his own wife* (Mk 10:11). Furthermore, Paul states that husband and wife have sexual obligations to one another (1 Cor 7:3–4), not merely the wife to the husband. Peter puts the point even more strongly by talking of husband and wife as joint heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7). We have, then, in the New Testament the beginnings of the development of a different understanding of marriage in which a wife is not her husband’s chattel, but they are mutually responsible partners.¹⁴

According to O’Brien, the language of “subordination” was not especially characteristic of Greek literature concerning marriage.¹⁵ He seems to want to regard it as being rather a specifically Christian virtue here. Paul’s teaching, we are told, does not rest on natural inferiority of any kind but is a call to voluntary

assumption of a position grounded in a hierarchy laid down in the order of creation: “The Christian wife should recognize and accept her subordinate place in this hierarchy.”¹⁶ What O’Brien seems to be doing here (and throughout his expositions of both letters) is to try to base Paul’s teaching here on a creation ordinance laid down in Genesis and to argue that Paul is inculcating Christian virtues that would be valid and appropriate even if they did not happen to fit in with the social conventions of his time. In this way O’Brien can maintain that Paul’s teaching is not culture-bound but rests on theological principles. But there are problems!

Nowhere does O’Brien indicate precisely what such “submission” would entail in practice.¹⁷ The reader is left with no guidance as to what the Christian wife today should actually do. Suppose, for example, that the wife has a husband who does not treat her with honor as the weaker sex (1 Pet 3:7) and insists on intercourse when she is not disposed to it: is she to be submissive to his will if he forces himself on her? Or suppose that the husband is guilty of domestic violence: does she meekly forgive and put up with it? It would seem that there must be some limits set to wifely submission. It is obviously inadequate to say that the husband for his part must behave lovingly: what is the wife to do when he is not behaving lovingly?

Submission, then and now. Social conventions of the time, both Greco-Roman and Jewish, expected subordination from the wife.¹⁸ The same husbandly attitudes would continue after conversion to Christian faith, and the same structures of marriage would be assumed.¹⁹ An insubordinate wife was a bad witness for the gospel in a situation where non-Christian husbands expected subordination.

It may also be the case that some Christian wives were carrying their new freedom in Christ too far. Elsewhere Paul had affirmed that there is no longer “slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28),²⁰ and they may have been claiming a carry-over from their position in the congregation into the household.²¹ This would have accentuated the problem faced by husbands who felt that the gospel was too radical in its social effects.

But in the Western world today expectations have changed. Many husbands and wives see one another as equal partners, and one-sided subordination of the wife to the husband is seen as inappropriate and is not demanded. Does Christian teaching to new converts require the imposition of a relationship of subordination that was previously not present?²²

Here we must note the quite remarkable stress on wives being submissive “in everything” to their husbands which is found in the parallel passage in Ephesians (Eph 5:24; cf. Col 3:20 of children; 3:22, of slaves).²³ This would suggest that no area of a wife’s life is outside the jurisdiction of her husband.²⁴ It is hard to believe that any modern Christian husband would take this in such a comprehensive manner so that he could (at least in theory) interfere in any aspect of her life.

All this suggests that adherence to the literal sense of what Paul says would produce a very odd understanding of what marriage is: a relationship in which a wife is basically a person controlled by her husband in every respect in the same way as children and slaves.

Indications that we must move beyond the “letter” of Paul’s instructions. If we put together the instructions given by Paul to Christian wives and husbands, we have a combination of teachings that points us forward to a deeper understanding of marriage. The wife is submissive to her husband in that she has to follow out all the decisions that he makes; he for his part loves his wife and does nothing that could be regarded as harsh, which must surely mean that he will not make decisions that cause her pain

or discomfort unless there is mutual agreement between them. This structure might be labeled “love-patriarchy.” But once love is taken as seriously as that, it would seem to follow that the wife is, in fact, being treated as an equal partner, with her husband’s decision being, in effect, hers as well.

Such a marriage relationship is different from the master-slave or the employer-employee relationship. An employer may discuss tasks with employees to get their points of view, but if there is a difference of opinion, the employer’s decision is the determinative one. The contract lays down that in the last resort the employer decides what is to be done, and if the workers don’t like it, in theory at least they can resign. Yet this is how hierarchicalists must see marriage: when the rubber hits the road, the husband must overrule the wife.²⁵

But does this apply in areas where the wife may have expertise or insight that the husband lacks? Does it apply in areas where the wife will be put to considerable inconvenience or even self-sacrifice? The hierarchicalist will presumably say that the loving husband will take his wife’s desires into consideration. But in the end he has the authority to command, and even if he is not a loving, considerate husband, the wife must still obey.

It is actually very difficult to see where a loving contemporary hierarchical husband would in practice insist on his way over against the will of his wife. I suspect that in fact many husbands who are hierarchicalists in theory are virtually egalitarians in practice.

What I have been arguing is that the actual *nature* of “submission” is not explained or dictated by the passage and that there are probably differences among different ages, cultures and individual situations. But above all, the command to husbands to love their wives and the fact that a wife is not a slave or a child indicate that something is silently happening to the nature of the relationship. From patriarchalism we have moved to love-patriarchalism, and the road is open to mutual love between brothers and sisters in Christ. This final step was not taken by Paul, any more than he took the step from accepting slavery to recognizing that his own teaching contained the seeds of its inevitable abolition, but this is the direction in which the evidence clearly points. Mutual love transcends submission.

Summing up so far. Several conclusions about the Colossians teachings can be stated briefly.

The teaching in Colossians is given in a situation where the wife was expected to be submissive to her husband. Paul sees, as he often does, the first line of Christian duty to lie in doing what is expected within an existing setup: that the wife should be submissive.²⁶

He balances this with a reminder to husbands that they must act in love—and that will certainly affect the way they express their authority. Paul assumes the structure of patriarchalism but qualifies it by propounding a love-patriarchalism.

Here he gives no theological foundation for this understanding of authority and submission in marriage.²⁷ We can therefore say that the basic qualities of loving and seeking to please one’s partner upheld here can be carried over into a different structure of marriage and that in itself the passage does not require that Christians move back to a hierarchical view of marriage.²⁸ Love that cares for the partner, does not make unreasonable demands and is willing to endure sacrifice for the sake of the partner is paramount.²⁹

The concept of marriage between equal partners is just beginning to be perceived in the New Testament, and Paul should not be expected to step outside his time and see the consequences of his teaching any more than he is to be faulted for not commanding the abolition of slavery or the development of universal suffrage.

The argument is incomplete, however, until we also bring in the evidence of Ephesians. Does the fuller use of theological argument here strengthen my case, or does it constitute an objection to it? Does Paul's teaching not only require that people fulfill the requirements of the social structures in which they find themselves but also mandate these structures themselves? Or does Scripture itself lead us to adopt different structures from those prevalent in the first century—just as we have seen to be the case with children, slavery and government?

Mutual submission. Ephesians 5:18 contains an injunction to be filled with the Spirit, to which is attached a set of participial phrases, the last of which is “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (see Eph 5:21). This in turn is expanded with a more particular reference to wives submitting to their husbands as to the Lord,³⁰ on the analogy of the church's submission to Christ, and to the obedience of children and slaves. The general command to submission is not particularized with reference to husbands, parents and masters. So the question arises whether the opening command is to be taken generally, of all Christians being mutually submissive to all other Christians,³¹ or whether it simply means that some Christians—that is, all wives, children and slaves—should be actually submissive to those to whom they ought to be submissive.³²

O'Brien argues for a purely one-directional submission in this verse.³³ He states that *hypotassomai* is used in the New Testament only of submission within ordered relationships, that is, only of persons being submissive to those who are over them in some recognized hierarchical relationship (citizens-government, church members-leaders, Christ-God the Father, servants-masters) and therefore it cannot be used of mutual relationships or weakened to refer simply to deference and courtesy to others.³⁴

Elsewhere, however, reciprocal duties are laid down for believers. The key passage in Paul is Galatians 5:13, where believers are to be *slaves* to one another (even stronger than “being submissive”!) in love. Similarly, in Philippians 2:3–4 they are to consider others better than themselves and to look to the interests of others (cf. Rom 12:10). If this is to be true of Christian relationships in general, it must surely include the marriage relationship. In John 13:14 the disciples are to wash one another's feet, and Jesus as Lord sets an example by doing this to his disciples. The collocation of a command to the younger to be submissive to the older members/elders with a command that all are to put on humility toward one another in 1 Peter 5:5 indicates that it was possible to combine the general and the specific and offers a parallel to what is done here.

It follows that all believers should place themselves under other believers in this spirit of mutual humility, even if this is the only place where the verb *hypotassomai* is so used. Ephesians itself provides a context that inclines toward this interpretation in this particular verse: Paul uses the pronoun *allēlous* in Ephesians 4:2, 25, 32, thus establishing a presumption in favor of its use here for church members in general.³⁵

What Paul is doing, then, is to teach the need for a concern for one another's interests and for a mutual submission in the church which provides a new context for the one-sided submission that was expected within certain relationships at that time.³⁶ He is doing something new, even startling, with the language here.

As in his teaching on the new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus as brothers both in the Lord and in the flesh, Paul has here enunciated a principle that calls into question the structures of the ancient world, although he himself probably did not perceive its full implications.³⁷

Head as metaphor. The instruction is backed up with the statement that the husband is the “head” of the wife (cf. 1 Cor 11:3), and an analogy is drawn with Jesus as “head” of the church.³⁸ Attempts to weaken the sense of *head* to mean nothing more than “source” are not persuasive, although notions of the head as “prominent, outstanding or determinative” and thus possessing “preeminence” or functioning as “ground of being” are well founded.³⁹ But attempts to show that the term must virtually always carry up front the nuance of “authority” also need careful scrutiny.

Gordon Fee has rightly argued that the usage here needs to be understood in the light of the usage elsewhere in this letter and in Paul.⁴⁰ In Colossians and Ephesians the term is used of Christ as the supplier of guidance and power to the body; the body must hold fast to the head from which it grows (Col 2:19) and must grow up into the head (Eph 4:15–16). In Ephesians 1:22 Christ as head over all things is given to the church, the clear implication being that the church shares in his headship over the other powers in the universe. Fee then argues that the point of the analogy here is that the husband is the person on whom the wife depends just as the church depends on Christ, and therefore submission is appropriate. The statement that Christ is the Savior of the body favors such an understanding of the husband as essentially the provider, the one who cares for his wife.⁴¹ There is nothing more to the analogy than that. The wife is not her husband's body (as Eph 5:28 makes clear), and the Christ-church relationship is an analogy or pattern, not a ground for the wife's submission.

Submission would be naturally expected in this relationship in the ancient world, especially as the wife could have been as much as twelve to fifteen years younger than her husband and the marriage would have been arranged. Consequently, in the first-century context submission can be seen as appropriate, but the element of authority is not inherent for all time. What Paul is doing is to indicate the way wives should be submissive within a society where such submission was expected, just as he can also tell slaves how they are to be obedient in the slave-master relationship; in both cases he bases it in the relationship to Christ.

The injunction to husbands is *not* that they exercise their proper authority; rather it has a quite extraordinary emphasis on the total love and devotion that the husband must show to the wife. This is developed by the use of two “natural” analogies: the love that one has for one's own body and the love that one has for oneself. The second of these is the criterion for supreme human love, in that love of neighbor is to be as intense as love of oneself. The biblical command to love one's neighbor as oneself is here transmuted and focused into love for one's wife as for oneself.

These motifs are taken to an even higher level by being placed in the context of the love of Christ that extended to self-giving in death for the church. This is followed by a statement of the purpose of Christ's love: that he might have a completely pure and blameless bride. The concept of the church as the body of Christ is also taken up. The correspondence in the analogy is partial in that the wife is not the body of the husband, and therefore the command is that the husband love his wife and care for her in the same way he cares for his actual body.⁴² The husband's love thus is expressed in care and respect. Not only is this instruction to

husbands to love their wives unusual and unconventional in the world of the New Testament,⁴³ but the sheer intensity of the love demanded is extraordinary.

Like Colossians 3, this passage teaches a requirement for a husband to love and care for a wife, which was certainly compatible in the first-century context with a position of authority over her (just as parents love their children). What we have here, then, is another example of “love-patriarchalism,” in which the traditional element of submission by the wife to her husband is required, but with a remarkable development of the motif of self-giving love as the dominant characteristic of the Christian husband. The tensions that we found in Colossians are here in an even stronger form.

“To have fulfilled one’s role and carried out one’s duties under the guidelines of mutual submission, and as a wife to have subordinated oneself voluntarily to a husband who cherishes one with a self-sacrificial love, would have been to experience a very different reality than that suggested by the traditional discussions of household management.”⁴⁴ There is thus something distinctly new in the Christian understanding of marriage, even though Paul’s teaching here assumes a patriarchal structure of marriage. Does it, however, *require* this structure? Interpretation is not complete until we have asked what it has to say to contemporary readers.

Evangelical Hermeneutics

The typical conservative evangelical method of dealing with Scripture, particularly its ethical injunctions, is to derive from any specific passage the underlying, “timeless” principles or injunctions that are expressed in the cultural, specific setting of the time, and then to ask how these are to be reexpressed in a manner appropriate to a modern setting.⁴⁵ Despite criticisms that have been offered of it, this approach must remain an essential part of our hermeneutics. The problems lie in determining what is culturally or situationally bound and what is of universal relevance. Problems arise where something that might be thought to be time bound is apparently justified in Scripture by a theological principle. Probably many Christians would thankfully recognize the command to women to learn in silence in 1 Timothy 2 as specific to a situation were it not for the apparent appeal to fundamental truths in the following verses; fortunately, the passage should be interpreted otherwise.⁴⁶ Here in Ephesians the problem is the apparent theological rooting of onesided submission by the wife, with the husband as her head and holding a position analogous to Christ’s.

I have argued above that the “head” metaphor can be seen in Paul’s cultural context in terms of a relationship in which submission is appropriate. But there is more to be said. A currently popular approach attributes to Scripture a broader type of authority—that of a story or metanarrative.⁴⁷ On this view the fundamental thing in Scripture is the interpretation of history and existence in terms of the (true and valid) story of God as Creator and Redeemer who acts in history to save people, with consequences for how they are to behave. On this view the Bible does not so much give detailed instructions for conduct as set the patterns that should mold our behavior.

If this approach is taken on its own, its weaknesses are obvious. But if we combine it with the first approach, its strength is to emphasize that instructions for conduct must be seen and understood in light of the overarching story; Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. All statements in Scripture are to be interpreted in light of the total context provided by the scriptural

story. This approach takes seriously the need to recognize the “center” or “climax” of the biblical revelation and to evaluate the continuing significance of the parts in light of the center. It is precisely because of this principle that much of the legal teaching in the Old Testament is recognized to have reached its fulfillment and its end in Christ and is no longer applicable to Christians.

A further principle recognizes that growth and development are possible both in doctrine and in ethical requirements beyond the explicit letter of the scriptural revelation. The recognition that slavery is incompatible with Christian faith goes beyond the explicit teaching of Scripture while being fully scriptural: we now recognize (as the biblical writers were not yet able to do) that slavery is inconsistent with the biblical understanding of humanity in creation and redemption.⁴⁸ The biblical assumption that the “powers that be” are ordained by God has not prevented Christians from defending democracy, including universal suffrage.⁴⁹

We must go beyond the letter of Scripture when the trajectory of scriptural teaching takes us further than what Scripture explicitly says and requires us to recognize that some culturally specific scriptural teachings and commands are no longer mandatory. All recognize that the Christian revelation takes us well beyond the Old Testament revelation (and renders some aspects of it obsolete). By analogy, the growth in understanding of Christian revelation under the continuing guidance of the Spirit may lead us to apply some culturally specific parts of the New Testament in a way that does not compromise its supreme authority for us.

This procedure is emphatically not a means of getting rid of scriptural passages that contemporary readers may happen not to like. The combination of (1) searching for basic theological and ethical principles, (2) interpreting individual passages in the light of Scripture as a whole and (3) recognizing that there is progress in revelation is a method of interpretation that is based on the Bible itself.⁵⁰

Application to wives and husbands. That there is a general trajectory in Scripture toward a recognition of the equality of men and women in salvation is incontestable.

It is appropriate to look again at slavery. The obedience of the slave to the master is seen as an aspect of service to Christ, which seems to imply that the individual master is to be treated in the same way as Christ and possesses a similar authority. Yet the authority of the master is relativized by his being submissive to Christ. Once it is said that slaves and masters have the same Master and are both answerable to him, the absolute rights of the master over the slave are relativized. Later, even where legal slavery had ceased to exist, the position of many employers was tantamount to that of masters in that employees had no option but to obey them. It took the development of unions to change that situation. There can thus be a move from master to employer in which the apparently divinely permitted structure of slavery is transformed into something else that is no longer slavery. A similar development with regard to marriage is both appropriate and necessary.

The de facto patriarchal authority of the husband is so transformed by the command to love his wife that it ceases to be exercised in the old way. Thus not only are abuses of power recognized to be wrong but the power relationship itself is also seen to be inappropriate. When this husbandly duty of love is undertaken consistently and fully, a one-sided submission becomes impossible, for Christian love by the husband requires him also to respect and submit to his wife. This insight could not be expected to develop immediately, and the New Testament writers should

not be faulted for not spelling this out explicitly. The implications of Ephesians 5:21 and other passages noted above must be allowed to have their proper force.

The wife's submission ceases to be one-sided in that she is recognized by her husband as a joint heir of grace and as a full person, not as a chattel. It is impossible to see how taking joint heirship seriously can allow a husband to expect one-sided submission "in everything" from his wife; her relationship with him is different from that of a child or servant.

Only by interpreting Paul in this way are we in fact upholding the authority of Scripture. Paul's teaching remains authoritative for today, but it is authoritative, just as he himself would insist, as an expression of the gospel. And it is the authority of the gospel that compels us to move forward into an understanding of how the *structure* of marriage is no longer to be understood in patriarchal terms. To repeat: the thesis of this study is that we do not reach this insight into mutual partnership in marriage through ignoring Scripture or imposing anachronistic interpretations on it; rather, Scripture itself as a whole and in the light of its central revelation of the gospel compels us to a deeper understanding of human relationships. The raw materials for this deeper understanding are there in Scripture, but their full significance was not yet realized, just as we recognize that the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology were formulated only at a later point.

So Christian employees do seek to serve their employers willingly and honestly and with commitment, but they also know that they have rights and they are not slaves. Christian children will obey their parents as is appropriate in those who are not yet adult and mature. A Christian wife recognizes that in the relationship of marriage she is summoned to practice self-denial and prefer the interests of her husband, but she is also aware that she is in a relationship of love with a fellow heir of the grace of life and that her attitude to her husband is balanced by his calling to self-denial and preferring of *her* interests. Although these passages say nothing whatever about wives' specifically loving their husbands (!), in light of the gospel they cannot do less than show their husbands the kind of love their husbands are here told to show them.

A recognition of the fully egalitarian implications of scriptural teaching thus takes place at the level of the application of Scripture to the contemporary reader, rather than solely at the level of what individual texts were saying specifically to the original readers. But the deeper application is made in light of the gospel and in recognition that the gospel pushes us on to a fuller understanding, while the new situations in which we live require us to seek in Scripture answers to questions that lie beyond the horizons of the original readers and writers alike.⁵¹

The positive elements in Ephesians are to be characteristic of both partners: a mood of subordination in which each partner subordinates their own interests to their spouse's, the motivation of sacrificial love in which each partner strives to help the other achieve the sanctification that is God's will for them, and the consciousness that this loving relationship is the nearest thing on earth to the relationship between Christ and the church.

These elements are possible within an egalitarian relationship. Indeed, they are *more* attainable within such a relationship, since the roles of both husband and wife are more fully spelled out than in the patriarchal setting. For what is being done is not to deny that wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord but to add that husbands also must submit to their wives as to the Lord. And whereas Paul tells only husbands to show love and only wives

to show respect, now both realize that they are called to love each other with the kind of love Christ has shown to the church. Within this context of total submission flowing out of love on both sides, there can develop a freedom for each to be what Christ wants them to be in their high calling as his people.

Conclusion

Paul wrote as he did about marriage because in his world he did not know any other form than the patriarchal. As he did with other relationships, he worked within the structures of his time and gave directions for Christian behavior within them. The danger is to think that this validates the setup for all time. Christians have rightly seen that slavery and unrepresentative government are inconsistent with the implications of the gospel. They have also recognized that the relation of children to parents can take different forms in different cultures and times. They have been less certain about marriage and the place of women in leadership and teaching in the church, because many have thought that the New Testament sanctioned a patriarchal, subordinationist structure.

My contention is that in the passages we have examined, when rightly understood, patriarchalism is not given a theological grounding as the only possible structure, and that the gospel itself leads us out of patriarchalism into a different kind of relationship that mirrors more adequately the mutual love and respect that is God's purpose for his redeemed people.

NOTES

(References to "this volume" refer to *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Please see that volume for a list of abbreviations used below.)

1. The secular forms do not include direct address to the "inferior" parties. For Paul, however, children and slaves are part of the household church and take their place alongside the other members.
2. The mention of masters and slaves indicates that the texts are concerned with wealthier households where the congregations would have met, rather than those of the poorer classes.
3. Cf. P. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 419.
4. If the command to love within the marriage relationship is not unique to Christianity, it is certainly not common in non-Christian writings.
5. P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians*, WBC (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1982), p. 224 (cf. *Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 440–41), states that Paul here is probably addressing young children rather than those who are already grown up, but he offers no evidence for this assumption. For detail on children in the ancient world, see especially A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 398–403.
6. We can ignore here the category of the freedperson and the relationships between patrons and clients in the New Testament world.
7. This point is valid whether Christ died literally "for all people" or "for all kinds of people."
8. Although classical Greece thought of itself as "democratic," a huge proportion of the populace was permanently disfranchised.
9. Older sons and daughters should respect their parents but are not expected to obey them "in everything."
10. No specifically Christian backing is provided for this injunction, beyond the fact that it appears within the context of a Christian ethic that inculcates love, forbearance and forgiveness to be shown by all to all (Col 3:12–15).
11. Although Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 367–68, 402, and Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 533, think that there is little or no difference between the verbs, it seems to me that there is a distinction. *Be submissive* is broader and conveys more than simply obeying specific commands; *obey* could have the effect of reducing the husband-wife relationship to a purely authoritarian one. *Obey* is used in this connection only

in 1 Peter 3:6, and there only with reference to Sarah's relationship to Abraham.

12. O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 437, states that submission was called for "not because it was conventional for wives in Greco-Roman society, but because it was part and parcel of the way in which they were to serve their Lord." But this ignores the fact that the particular way they were to serve the Lord was constrained at least to some extent by social convention.

13. L. W. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex* (London: SCM Press, 1989), pp. 147–67. See the carefully nuanced discussion in David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 178–93, 229–37.

14. O'Brien is right to affirm that Paul's injunctions are given to wives as "ethically responsible partners" (*Colossians*, p. 220).

15. O'Brien, *Colossians*, pp. 221–22, holds that this motif is in fact rare in the secular literature. But although the actual term is only found in two passages, the motif is more widespread and was certainly found in Judaism (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 367).

16. O'Brien, *Colossians*, p. 222.

17. See, however, G. W. Knight III, "The Family and the Church," in *RBMW*, pp. 345–57.

18. Roman law upheld husbandly authority.

19. Paul here (and especially in *Ephesians*) assumes a situation in which both husband and wife are believers, although he would presumably have given the same advice to partners in mixed marriages. See especially Best, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 525–27.

20. In *Colossians* 3:11, however, this crucial pairing is omitted.

21. Some such emancipatory tendencies were probably an element in the situation faced in 1 Corinthians and in 1 Timothy 2; B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Ethos and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 121–41; I. H. Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), p. 441.

22. Presumably the contributors to *RBMW* wish to see this happen.

23. Paul would certainly have expected obedience that would clash with obedience to the Lord; cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 386 n. 89.

24. Cf. Best, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, p. 538.

25. Knight, "Family and the Church," pp. 349–50. This remains the case, although a loving Christian husband must show consideration for his wife (Wayne Grudem, "Wives like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them. 1 Peter 3:1–7," in *RBMW*, pp. 205–8).

26. The presupposition of these texts in Paul is that the householder is a believer (quite the opposite of the situation in 1 Peter 2:18–3:7). He would surely not countenance a believing wife's submitting to her husband's demands that she continue to honor the household gods.

27. O'Brien (*Colossians*, pp. 222–23) does think that the wife's submission is "fitting in the Lord" because of the hierarchy established by the Lord at creation. But "fearing the Lord" is also brought in as a sanction in the case of the master-slave relationship, which is not a creation ordinance.

28. To say this is emphatically not to imply that our contemporary structures of marriage (and equivalent relationships) should be taken over without a Christian critique. I am arguing for a *Christian* view of marriage here, not a secular one.

29. Thus the duty of caring, at considerable personal cost, for a severely ill or handicapped spouse would be understood as an integral part of Christian marriage "in sickness and in health," even if Scripture does not explicitly say so.

30. Both the NRSV and TNIV treat this last participle as if it were a separate imperative introducing the new section. This obscures the fact that the verb is closely tied to what precedes so as to indicate a further aspect of the new behavior that is associated with being filled with the Spirit. In order to make the flow of thought smoother in English, they then repeat the verb in the specific injunction to wives.

31. Bruce, *Epistles*, p. 384 n. 79.

32. Clearly the specific submission required of wives is only to their own husbands; there is no suggestion of submission to other men. Accordingly, there is no prohibition here of a woman's exercising authority in the world at large, whether as a political ruler or in business. But this point was probably outside Paul's horizon.

33. O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 398–405. There is some anticipation of these arguments and a response to them in Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 140–41.

34. He further argues that the reciprocal pronoun *allelous* is not always used for "one another" but can simply mean "others." A careful examination of all the references that he cites does not establish the point. For example, Galatians 6:2 refers to bearing the burdens of each other as is appropriate, and 1 Corinthians 11:33 surely means loosely "you wait for me and I wait for you, whichever of us is there first." Admittedly, the pronoun is regularly used of people's doing things to others who are

also doing the same things to them, but without specifying that literally everybody does it to literally everybody else. "We talked to each other" clearly means "I said something to you and you said something to me." "They said to one another" suggests more loosely that an unspecified number of people in the group said something to others in the group, with the result that at least some people were both speakers and hearers. But there is nothing in the usage to suggest that the people can be divided into distinct groups of those who spoke and heard. Similarly, it is highly unlikely that on hearing "Be subject to one another," some members of the congregation said, "But of course that doesn't apply to me, since I am a husband/father/master/church leader."

O'Brien also appeals to the flow of the argument, in which the general command to be submissive (to appropriate authorities) is then unpacked with specific reference to wives and husbands. This simply begs the question.

35. Best, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 515–16. Cf. also in the immediate context *Ephesians* 5:19, where *heautous* is equivalent to the reciprocal pronoun. Reciprocity is also prominent in *Colossians*.

36. J. P. Sampley's view that the writer uses *Ephesians* 5:22 to relativize what follows is incorrect ("*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*": *A Study of Traditions in Eph 5:21–33* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971], pp. 116–17); cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 366. Nevertheless, *Ephesians* 5:22 remains part of the scriptural context within which we must interpret the passage.

37. We may compare this to the way Peter directs his readers to honor all people as well as to honor the emperor, and bids Christian husbands honor their wives as joint heirs of the grace of life.

38. On the origins of this motif see I. H. Marshall, "For the Husband Is Head of the Wife: Paul's Use of Head and Body Language," in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, ed. P. J. Williams, Andrew D. Clarke, Peter M. Head and David Instone-Brewer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 2004), pp. 165–77.

39. Cf. Heinrich Schlier, "αεφαλή," in TDNT 3:674, 679; cf. Richard S. Cervin, "Does *Kephalē* Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal," *TrinJ* 10 (1989): 85–112. Linda Belleville argues that nuances of "source" are present in the usage here (see her "Women in Ministry," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001], pp. 137–39). The debate has not been closed by the work of Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of *Kephalē* ('Head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," *JETS* 44 (2001): 25–66. See the careful study by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 812–22, who argues for multiple meanings. Grudem deals mainly with the external evidence, but as Fee, Belleville and others insist, Paul's usage must be understood by considering how he uses the word in its various contexts.

40. Especially in this section I am grateful to Gordon Fee for his helpful editorial comments. See also his "The Cultural Context of *Ephesians* 5:18–6:9," *Priscilla Papers* 16, no. 1 (2002): 3–8, and chapter eight in this volume.

41. Thus rather than the mention of Christ as Savior of the church having no counterpart in the analogy (as is often assumed), there is some correspondence with the role of the husband as the provider for his wife. The thought of the husband's acting as "savior" by leading his wife to Christian conversion would be contrary to Paul's usage of this noun, with its rich LXX background of God as Savior. He uses the verb *save* in this way, but with the sense of "winning" (1 Cor 7:16; 9:22).

42. In the succeeding elaboration it is recognized that the husband and wife form one flesh through marriage, and therefore it would seem that in loving his wife the husband does love himself.

43. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 374.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 390–92.

45. See William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

46. See chapter twelve in this volume.

47. See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), with the discussion by Douglas J. Moo, Judith Gundry-Volf and Richard B. Hays in *BBR* 9 (1999): 271–96.

48. Thus taking the authority of Scripture seriously may require us to introduce some fresh commands that go beyond the letter of Scripture as such.

49. This is not the place to illustrate how Christian doctrine builds on scriptural material to produce understandings, e.g., of the Trinity, the atonement or ecology, that were not envisaged by the biblical writers.

50. See I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004).

51. Thus it is appropriate to look for answers that will be in accordance with Scripture to questions such as the status of the unborn child and people in a so-called vegetative state.

First Corinthians 7: Paul's Neglected Treatise on Gender

Ronald W. Pierce

Introduction

One searches in vain for a focused study of 1 Corinthians 7:1–40 by an evangelical addressing Paul's extensive call for mutuality in marriage and singleness as it relates to the contemporary gender debate.¹ Instead, individual sections of this passage are referenced on occasion by both sides, usually in isolation from their larger context, and generally as peripheral to the debate.²

Evangelicals have wrongly neglected this text on many counts. First, Paul's words here are three times longer than any gender passage in his other letters—in fact, slightly longer than all of his other comments on the subject taken together.³ Second, he addresses no less than twelve related, yet distinct, issues regarding marriage and singleness—again, more than in any other text.⁴ Third, his rhetoric is explicitly, consistently, and intentionally gender inclusive—while at the same time reflecting a carefully balanced sense of mutuality.⁵ Fourth, written about the time of Galatians (A.D. 49–55), 1 Corinthians 7 applies to marriage Paul's declaration that race, class, and gender are irrelevant for both status in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and relationships in the church community (Gal. 3:3; 5:1, 7, 16, 25).

Thus, 1 Corinthians 7 should be considered a point of reference for later gender texts (1 Cor. 11, 14, Eph. 5, Col. 3, 1 Pet. 3, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 2) as a more comprehensive statement against which these should be interpreted. It is a collection of “seed ideas”⁶ leading to Paul's larger theology of gender. Though this chapter should not be used to nullify or diminish the clear teachings of other texts, it must be afforded its own voice in the evangelical dialogue.

Paul's Twelve Principles of Mutuality

In response to an earlier letter from the Corinthian church, Paul writes to confront a distorted view of spirituality, marriage, and the end of the age.⁷ He advises his readers to remain as they were when called to Christ, because being single or married is irrelevant for personal spirituality and devotion to ministry.⁸ But, Paul also appends to this advice twelve marriage-related principles for practical living,⁹ by which it becomes clear that the occasion of his remarks is not fully the same as his purpose.

More specifically, it is Paul's way of framing these twelve principles that catches the eye of the careful reader. Here, he does not address men as “heads” of the Roman household (as he does in 1 Cor. 11:3 and Eph. 5:23). Nor does he only refer to believers in the generic masculine (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:24, 29, and many other instances)—though both were common conventions of his day. Instead, his rhetoric is at the same time gender-specific and gender-inclusive. Such an emphasis on mutuality is striking given the general assumptions toward patriarchy in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions at that time.

1. Fidelity in marriage

... each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. (7:2b)10

Although sexual immorality is the stated occasion for Paul's first principle, he says more than is necessary to address this concern. With explicit and precisely mirrored language, he addresses the husband and wife individually. Though he later addresses male overseers alone regarding this matter (1 Tim. 3:2), his commitment to mutual fidelity in marriage remains the comprehensive principle.

By calling each man to be faithful to his own wife and each woman to her own husband, Paul condemns in principle a wide range of “unsanctioned sexual intercourse,”¹¹ such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality—and, by extension, polygamy.¹² Though men have more commonly perpetuated such behaviors throughout human history, Paul remains committed here to addressing men and women in a mutual way.

2. Spousal rights

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. (7:3)

Paul's concern with sexual immorality continues as he calls believers to offer to their spouses what is rightfully theirs: regular and voluntary sexual intimacy. They are to give generously, not depriving each other. The longer statement addresses the husband first,¹³ then comes a shorter statement to the wife—but the inclusive, compound conjunction “and likewise also” makes it clear that the same obligation evenhandedly applies to both.

More importantly, the main verb is literally “to give up or yield.” Regarding the most intimate rights in marriage, the emphasis is not on exercising or asserting those rights. In this case, the husband—the one with greater power and status—is called upon first to yield by giving what rightfully belongs to his wife. Then, to be complete, the wife is told the same obligation applies to her. Such mutuality regarding “marriage rights” is remarkable in a predominantly patriarchal world. And, by extension, it seems reasonable to apply this principle to other aspects of marriage.

3. Yielding authority

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (7:4)

Much debate has occurred in the last few decades regarding the notion of male authority over women in the society, church, and home¹⁴—even including a proposed model of permanent “authority/subordination” within the Trinity that human “male authority” supposedly is meant to reflect.¹⁵ In this context, it is imperative to realize that 1 Corinthians 7:4 is the only biblical text that clearly and explicitly addresses the question of authority in marriage—and here it is clearly mutual.¹⁶ Paul first balances personal rights with a model of giving what is due the recipient: sexual intimacy (v. 3). Then, he broadens this call to include the principle of yielding the presumed “authority” of “marriage partner” rather than exercising it (v. 4).

Like his call for fidelity in verse 2, the dual commands here are set in explicitly mirrored language. By doing so, Paul goes out of his way to be gender inclusive.

The uniqueness, content, and tone of this verse make it more important in the gender debate than most have been inclined to acknowledge. Paul's point is that neither spouse should claim authority over his or her own body. Instead, each should yield that authority to the other. This is the way of servanthood modeled by Jesus, who enjoys equal power and authority within the Triune Godhead, yet chooses the path of sacrificial service (Matt. 23:8–12, Phil. 2:5–8). In the same way, Paul calls for mutual yielding of authority among human beings—especially Christian marriage partners. One might say that he stands the traditional notion of male headship on its head (as he is inclined to do elsewhere; cf. 1 Cor. 11 and Eph. 5). Just as Jesus chooses to yield his rights, so both men and women should do the same.

Such a radical call to yield authority in marital intimacy should serve as a paradigm for yielding authority in other areas of marriage. In fact, the very notion of a husband exercising authority over his wife runs counter to the force of this statement. But, many still reject this idea based on two texts where the metaphorical use of “head” (*kephalē*) appears regarding husbands.

First, Paul uses the same noun for authority (*exousia*) in 1 Corinthians 11:10, where he declares, “a woman ought to have authority over her own head” while praying or prophesying. However, it is not clear there whether he is referring to the abstract idea of authority (the woman choosing how she might cover her head) or a tangible symbol of authority (some kind of head covering). Nor is it clear whether the woman's authority should be

over her literal head (topmost part of her body) or over her figurative head (her husband, who is called her “head” in 11:2). In addition, the term translated “head” can denote “authority over,” but also can carry the ideas of “topmost, preeminence, point of origin, or source of provision.”¹⁷ In contrast to this maze of interpretive difficulties, the command to yield authority over one's body in 1 Corinthians 7:4 is relatively simple and straightforward. Such clarity should help us to avoid the mistake of reading the unbiblical notion of the husband's authority over his wife into other texts.

Second, though he does not explicitly mention “authority” in Ephesians 5, Paul tells the wife to “submit herself” to her husband (who was culturally the “head” of the Roman household) as part of his principle of “submitting to one another” in the church (Eph. 5:21–22, 24). Though “headship” in the head/body metaphor can connote “authority over” or “source of provision” in the larger context of Ephesians (1:20–23, 4:15–16),¹⁸ Paul only reinforces the idea of “source of provision” for husbands to wives. Moreover, he calls husbands to sacrifice lovingly for their wives as Christ did for the church (5:25–30)—again, standing “headship” on its “head.”¹⁹ Though head of his wife, the husband is commanded to love her, *not* to exercise authority over her.

In the end, 1 Corinthians 7:4 remains the only clear and explicit statement in Scripture about authority within marriage—and here both husband and wife are called to yield it to the other in the deeply personal context of marital intimacy. Again, as Paul's earliest statement about marriage relations, this text should serve as a reference point for later texts—not to nullify those that are equally clear, but to help clarify those that are not.



When you give to CBE on Thursday, November 12, your support will go further!

This year, GTMD gifts will advance three projects:

“Truth Be Told” International Conference and Leadership Training

September 15–17, 2016 | Johannesburg, South Africa

Egalitarian Marriage Bible Study

Engage and Resource Ministry Partners, Denominations, and Academics

▶ Your gifts go further with over \$25,000 in matching grants

▶ Every gift increases CBE's chance of winning GTMD prizes

▶ Invite your friends and family to take part

For more details, visit givemn.org and search for CBE.

4. Consent for abstinence

Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again. . . . (7:5)

On occasion, personal devotion to extended times of fasting, study, and prayer can interfere with marital intimacy. When this happens, Paul insists that mutual consent be reached first with one's spouse. Though his "one another" language²⁰ here is more concise than before, he once again emphasizes mutual yielding rather than the notion that either spouse should presume a leadership role. This undermines the dysfunctional behavior in many patriarchal marriages where the husband exercises authority over his wife who counters with more subtle forms of control like withholding sexual intimacy.

Taken together, 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 presents mutual partnership as a model for marriage relationships—one that includes, among other things, mutual consent in processing marital decisions. At the same time, it militates against the longstanding and culturally endorsed notion that Paul's call for the wife to submit to her husband in Ephesians 5:22–24 somehow may be translated into the privilege or responsibility for a husband to exercise authority as head over his wife.²¹ Whereas Paul clearly calls for voluntary and mutual submission in marriage—including that of the wife—he nowhere instructs a husband to exercise authority over his wife, however benevolent.²²

5. Loss of a spouse through death

Now to the widowers²³ and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.²⁴ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. . . . (7:8–9)

The terms for "widowed" men and women differ slightly, yet are virtually synonymous in this context—implying that the same principle of "remain as you were when called" applies to both. At the same time, the variance reveals a contrast in the persistent cultural reality for men and women who have lost spouses to death. The change for women has generally been much more dramatic throughout history, while that for men has been relatively minimal. However, though Paul certainly recognizes these differences, his advice is the same to both regardless of gender.

6. Initiating divorce with a believer

A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (7:10b–11)

Here, the wife is addressed first, more extensively, and with slightly different language. She should not "separate from" her husband, whereas he is not to "send away or divorce" his wife. Yet again, the variance may reflect the reality of Paul's day: A man usually had greater power to bring about a divorce than a woman. But, the difference is not substantive, as evidenced by Paul's inclusive use of the stronger term for divorce for both marriage partners in verses 12–13. In the end, the actions he prohibits, left unchecked with either spouse, could lead to the dissolution of her or his marriage.

In addition, Paul tells the wife that, if she leaves her husband, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled. Yet, given the larger

context of this chapter, the wife's call to reconciliation should be understood to apply equally to the husband. Though Paul's reason for addressing the wife first and more extensively is not clear, it continues to serve his apparent interests in constructing a balanced theology of gender. By doing so, Paul empowers the woman in the relationship as she is called to exercise her will in the matter. In contrast, there is no greater responsibility or burden directed to the man. Instead, in the most stressful of times, wives and husbands must share together the challenge of staying together.

7. Initiating divorce with an unbeliever

If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. (7:12–13)

Paul continues his emphasis on mutuality in sustaining and nurturing a marriage, though here he addresses the problem of existing marriages with unbelievers. Once again, his language of "brother" versus "woman/wife" varies slightly, yet the difference remains insignificant, as the woman being addressed is clearly a sister in Christ.

Scripture makes it clear that God opposes a believer marrying outside of the faith,²⁵ as well as initiating divorce with one's spouse (1 Cor. 7:10–13)²⁶—though the latter is permitted in extreme circumstances.²⁷ With this larger backdrop in mind, Paul calls the believing spouse (husband or wife) to extend grace to the one who does not yet believe. Again, the decision is not presented as the primary responsibility of the husband, but that of the believer. This is similar to Paul's principle that spiritually mature believers are to help restore those who have sinned (Gal. 6:1).

8. Sanctification of an unbelieving spouse

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.²⁸ (7:14)

It falls outside the scope of this article to speculate on all that Paul means by the "sanctification" of spouses and children.²⁹ At the very least, an unbelieving spouse remaining with a believer sets himself or herself aside (along with their children) for holy purposes. That is to say, they remain under the sanctifying influence of the believing spouse—regardless of gender. Moreover, it is clear that to whatever extent one can be sanctified through one's spouse, such sanctification is mutual.

Further, this text must be allowed to inform our interpretation of Paul's instructions to husbands to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy . . ." (Eph. 5:25–27). Paul seems to imply that husbands can have a sanctifying influence on their wives. However, such gender-specific language should not be read as gender exclusive.³⁰ On the contrary, 1 Corinthians 7:14 makes it clear with explicit, gender-inclusive language that spiritual benefit to an unbelieving spouse can come from the wife to the husband as well. Keeping both texts in conversation can bring greater clarity to this aspect of the gender debate.

9. Responsibility when an unbelieving spouse leaves

But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (7:15)

Paul's admonitions above regarding separation and divorce are now softened to words of grace as he addresses believing spouses in mixed marriages as "brothers" and "sisters." Such gender-inclusive language also clarifies the broader range of meaning in the generic masculine "unbeliever" at the beginning of the verse.

Each of the eight principles discussed above has reflected the idea of mutual responsibility of a spouse *to* his or her partner, whereas this verse makes it clear that neither is responsible *for* the other. When an unbeliever chooses to leave, believers who have tried their best to keep the marriage together are under no further obligation, for "God has called us to live in peace." This could mean the peace to remain within a mixed marriage³¹ or the peace to let go of the relationship.³² The context seems to suggest the latter.³³

10. Salvation of an unbelieving spouse

How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (7:16)

Keeping in mind the principle of "responsible *to*, but not *for*," Paul asks a rhetorical question with the same perfectly mirrored language of mutuality employed at the beginning of this chapter. In this way, he explores the possibility that the marital commitment of a believer (male or female) to an unbeliever might lead to that person's salvation.

Surely, the spiritual benefit one human being can give to another can only go so far. It certainly falls short of Christ's effective benefit to save and sanctify the church. Yet, this passage suggests that we can partner with Christ as we aid unbelievers in the salvation and sanctification processes. But, at the same time, Paul makes it clear that neither of these potential benefits is limited to a husband or wife based on gender. On the contrary, with his consistent and explicitly inclusive language, Paul insists that these are mutually beneficial influences that either Christian spouse may have toward a partner who does not yet believe.

11. Change of status

Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. (7:26–28a)³⁴

This section may be addressing those men and women who have never been married, those who are already engaged, or both.³⁵ Consistent with one of his recurring themes in this chapter, Paul admonishes believers not to make a radical change in status because of the coming of the end of the age. Whether a man or woman is single, engaged, or married is irrelevant for functioning as a productive member of the New Covenant community.

In contrast to the word order of Paul's statements above about initiating divorce, here he addresses the men first and more extensively. We cannot be sure if this reflects a greater concern for

men than women on this matter. At the least it serves once more to contribute to the diverse picture of gender mutuality that Paul paints across these twelve principles.

12. Devotion to ministry

Those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you. . . . The unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. . . . The unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. (7:28b, 32–34)

It is ironic—though not entirely surprising—that Paul ends his larger discussion of gender mutuality in marriage with a statement regarding singleness. He has woven the thread of his preference for celibate singleness throughout the chapter with the purpose of serving Christ more efficiently (vv. 1, 6–8, 26, 29–35, 38b).

But, our focus in this article has not been on marriage versus singleness (though equally an important topic). Rather, the issue at hand has been the remarkable, gender-inclusive way that Paul has gone about his task. His closing statements remind the reader that ministry priorities apply equally to both men and women, whether devotion to prayer that distracts from sexual intimacy (v. 5) or devotion to ministry that avoids the distractions of marriage altogether (v. 28).

One last time, Paul addresses women shoulder to shoulder alongside men, making it clear that either may choose devotion to ministry instead of marriage. This runs contrary to the cultural tradition that a young woman should have as her goal in life to find a good husband who will lead and care for her. Whether it concerns the question of marriage or faithful service to Christ and the church, one of Paul's purposes in this chapter is to promote a Christian model of gender mutuality.

Conclusions

This exploratory survey of 1 Corinthians 7 is intended to begin a dialogue that will reframe the discussion of this important yet neglected text. Perhaps it will provide some fresh thinking toward a different approach to this passage in the context of the evangelical gender debate. Hopefully, a more extensive study of this chapter with a focus on its relevance for the gender debate will emerge in the near future. Until then, there are a few tentative conclusions that can be drawn.

First, both celibate singleness and faithful marriage have legitimate places in our churches. Paul's argument is: "If you're not ready to embrace a godly and mutual marriage relationship, perhaps you should stay single. And, if you're not ready to embrace godly celibate singleness, perhaps you should consider marriage. But remember, godly devotion to Christ is more important than either!"

Second, writing 1 Corinthians 7 around the same time as his letter to the Galatians, Paul's language of evenhanded gender mutuality contrasts sharply with what one might expect from a first-century writer. Yet, it "coheres with" the cryptic—though more famous—declaration in Galatians 3:28,³⁶ being most likely his first expansion on the new creation model of radical oneness in Christ. Though his words do not address every aspect of marriage,

this twelve-point statement is the most comprehensive made on the subject in Scripture—and, as such, it deserves much more attention in the contemporary evangelical dialogue on gender.

Third, as an early point of reference, this text shines the positive light of gender-inclusive mutuality on other statements in later gender texts (1 Cor. 11, 14; Eph. 5; Col. 3; 1 Pet. 3; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 2). By doing so, it helps to clarify important issues in the gender debate—such as yielding of authority (otherwise referred to by Paul in Eph. 5:21 as “submitting to one another”) and spiritual benefits (sanctification and salvation) that a believer may give to her or his spouse in marriage. First Corinthians 7 neither silences nor renders neutral the clear teachings of other texts, though it must be allowed to shed greater light on those that are not so clear.

NOTES

1. This is aside from the significant efforts expended to reconstruct the theological and cultural backdrop of 1 Cor. 7 and to address its many exegetical challenges. See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 484–87, 545–46, 566–67 for working bibliographies on these and other issues related to this text, but not discussed in this article.

2. Cp. the standard textbooks: Alvera Mickelsen, *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986); John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991); Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof, eds., *Women and Men in Ministry* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 2001); Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005).

3. In the Greek text, 1 Cor. 7:1–40 includes approximately 687 words, in comparison to a combined total of 680 words in 1 Cor. 11:2–16 (227), Eph. 5:21–33 (196), 1 Tim. 2:8–15 (97), Titus 2:2–6 (52), Gal. 3:26–29 (53), 1 Cor. 14:34–35 (36), and Col. 3:18–19 (19).

4. Noted by Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 270, 288, and Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 515. Compare ten virtues and vices in Titus 2, two prescriptions in Eph. 5 and Col. 3, four admonitions in 1 Tim. 2, two issues addressed in 1 Cor. 11, two concerns in 1 Cor. 14, and the single principle of practicing Christian oneness in Gal. 3.

5. It is a kind of gender “symmetry” or “parallelism.” See Glen G. Scorgie, *The Journey Back to Eden: Restoring the Creator’s Design for Women and Men* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 120, 142–44. This is remarkable considering its cultural context. Paul always includes specific reference to both men and women, yet varies the sequence. Men are mentioned first seven times (2, 12–15, 17), women, four times (3–4, 10–11, 16), and “each other” language is used once (5).

6. William J. Webb, “A Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic,” in Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 391.

7. Perhaps he is referring to Jesus’ words about being “like God’s angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30); see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 12, 269, 290, 330.

8. Throughout 1 Cor. 7, Paul reveals his personal preference for singleness (1, 6–8, 32–35, 38b) to serve God more efficiently in a world that is passing away (26, 29–31). At the same time, he acknowledges that each believer has his/her own “gift from God” (7), which meant for some getting married to avoid immorality (2, 5, 9, 36).

9. This is not the “complete Pauline teaching concerning marriage” (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 493–95). However, all twelve issues relate either to marriage or singleness (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 270). Thus, the entire context might be viewed as a discussion about the question of marriage.

10. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Today’s New International Version (TNIV, International Bible Society, 2005).

11. Paul’s use of the middle voice here connotes an intimate marital relationship (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick William Danker; electronic version 1.3 [Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 2001], 420).

12. The practice of a man having multiple wives (also known as polygyny) has

been far more common across ancient and modern cultures—to say the least—than that of a woman having multiple husbands (polyandry). Moreover, in the Greco-Roman culture of Paul’s day, abuse of marital fidelity was rampant. Demosthenes, a Greek statesman and orator from Athens, summed it up this way: “Courtesans were for companionship, concubines to meet everyday sexual needs, and wives to tend the house and bear legitimate children” (cited by Alison Le Cornu in *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002], 653).

13. The Greek word order in 1 Cor. 7:3 literally puts the wife first in both clauses, though in the first clause she is the object of the preposition, while the husband is the subject of the sentence. Perhaps Paul subtly puts the emphasis on the wives—even while addressing the husbands—because he was more concerned with their behavior in this particular church context.

14. See the renewed emphasis on an authority/subordination model in Russell Moore, “After Patriarchy, What?: Why Egalitarians are Winning the Gender Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006), 569–76.

15. See, for example, the opposing essays by Bruce Ware, “Equal in Essence, Distinct in Roles: Eternal Functional Authority and Submission among the Essentially Equal Divine Persons of the Godhead,” and Millard Erickson, “Eternal Subordination within the Trinity: An Analysis and Evaluation,” presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Washington, D.C.). In addition, the most extensive work from an egalitarian perspective can be found in two books by Kevin Giles: *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002) and *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006).

16. Piper and Grudem’s only response is that 1 Cor. 7:4 does not “nullify the husband’s [alleged] responsibility for general leadership” (never mentioned in the Bible). They acknowledge the emphasis on mutuality in this passage, but then go on to qualify the principle by insisting that the husband as head should develop “the pattern of intimacy” for himself and his wife (Piper and Grudem, *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 80). This passage nowhere suggests such a qualification.

17. Richard S. Cervin, “Does *Kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989), 85–112. See nn. 18–19.

18. Clinton E. Arnold, “Jesus Christ: ‘Head’ of the Church” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 346–66.

19. Michelle Lee-Barnewall is breaking new ground in her insightful chapter “Turning *Kephalē* on Its Head: Paul’s Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21–33,” forthcoming in *Christian Origins and Classical Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts; Brill).

20. Though the exact phrases vary slightly, the same idea is expressed with regard to at least eighteen different applications of Paul’s essential principle of mutuality: unity, kindness, honor, humility, grace, strength, attitude, hospitality, accountability (Rom. 12:5, 10, 16; 14:13, 19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16), care (1 Cor. 12:25), service, help (Gal. 5:13, 6:2), patience, truth-telling, forgiveness, submission (Eph. 4:2, 25, 32; 5:21), love, and comfort (1 Thess. 3:12, 4:18). A Christian model of mutuality plays a significant role in Pauline theology.

21. So argues George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” Piper and Grudem, *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 170.

22. Contrary to those who argue that wives should be “ordered under” husbands in a “subordinate position,” while husbands are to exercise “authority over” their wives as benevolent “leaders and providers” (Robert Saucy and Clinton Arnold, “Woman and Man in Apostolic Teaching,” Saucy and TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry*, 117–19 and 133–38 respectively).

23. So the alternate TNIV translation; also see Thiselton’s argument (*First Corinthians*, 515–16). The variance between the generic term “unmarried men/widowers” (similar to “unmarried women/widows” in 7:34) and the more explicit term “widows” in 7:8 is not as great as it may seem. The context of this chapter, as well as the specific parallel in this verse, confirms the meaning “widowers” in v. 8a.

24. The phrase “as I do” may indicate that Paul is writing as a divorcee (his wife may have left him at his conversion), or that he was widowed. Either way, he appears to have chosen to remain single for more effective service to Christ.

25. Instructive examples include Abraham’s search for a bride for Isaac

(Gen. 24), Samson's escapades with Philistine women (Judg. 13–16), Solomon's pagan wives that turned his heart from Yahweh (1 Kgs. 11), the infamous Jezebel (1 Kgs. 16–2 Kgs. 9), and, especially, Paul's prohibition against being "unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6).

26. The Law of Moses prohibits divorce under certain circumstances (Deut. 22:19, 29), yet allows for a "certificate of divorce" in other cases (Deut. 24:1, 3). Later, Malachi asserts, "God hates divorce" (Mal. 2:16).

27. Ironically, Ezra actually insists that the post-exilic Jews send away their pagan wives from the Judean community (Ezra 9–10). Later, Jesus grants exceptions for divorce in cases of "sexual immorality" (cp. the identical language in Matt. 19:9 with 1 Cor. 7:2). Jesus' ruling indicates that Moses' original exception was because of the "hardness of human hearts" (Matt. 19:7–8). Such exceptions may suggest the possibility of separation under other unusual circumstances, such as spousal abuse.

28. Again the "woman/wife" versus "brother" language appears, as it did in vv. 12–13. Yet, again, the difference is not significant for two reasons: (1) Paul is clearly equating the brother (7:14b) with the husband in the previous phrase (7:14a), and (2) the idea of a spouse who does not yet believe being "made holy" by the other spouse is applied mutually to both husband and wife.

29. In Paul's writings, the terms usually carry "moral/ethical implications" and can even function as metaphors for salvation (1 Cor. 1:30, 6:11), though the force of the word is probably not that strong here (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 299–302).

30. Contrary to Talley, who argues for a benevolent-patriarchy model of sanctification in marriage based on implications drawn from Christ's sanctification of the church in Eph. 5:25–27, yet without a single reference to the more explicit and gender-inclusive mention of sanctification in the context of marriage in 1 Cor. 7:14 (David L. Talley, "Gender and Sanctification: From Creation to Transformation," *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* [Spring 2003], 6–16).

31. See Fee, *First Corinthians*, 304–5.

32. See Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 537–40.

33. This is also consistent with Paul's earlier exhortation (based on a gospel of grace) that believers should "stand firm in the liberty in which Christ has made [them] free" (Gal. 5:1, 13). And, it is reinforced by his later admonition, "If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18).

34. The "interactive significance" of race and slavery for the question of gender relations (mentioned above by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:17–24) is essential to the larger discussion of a biblical theology of gender. This is confirmed by the grouping of the three categories in Gal. 3:28. However, that significance is not addressed here because of the limitations of this article. For such a discussion, see Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 545–65.

35. Again, see Thiselton's discussion of the various options for the subjects of this section (*First Corinthians*, 565–71) and Fee's (*First Corinthians*, 322–34). The argument of this article, however, does not depend on answering this question.

36. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 527.

"First Corinthians 7: Paul's Neglected Treatise on Gender" was originally published in *Priscilla Papers* vol. 23, no. 3 (Summer 2009).



Ron Pierce received his PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary. He has taught biblical studies and theology at Biola University since 1976, and currently teaches in the undergraduate program of the Talbot School of Theology there. He is co-editor of *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* with Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon Fee. Ron and his wife Pat live in Fullerton, California and have two adult children.

Christians for Biblical Equality

Christians for Biblical Equality exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.

Statement of Faith

- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons in equal power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

Core Values

- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
- Christ's redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God's design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women's gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

To learn more about CBE's core values, history, and ministry, visit cbe.today/info.

CBE Membership

CBE offers individual and organizational memberships. Members join a community of believers dedicated to biblical equality, and who together make CBE's ministry possible. Member benefits include:

- Subscriptions to CBE's quarterly publications, *Priscilla Papers* and *Mutuality* magazine, including digital access to back issues
- Exclusive discounts at CBE's bookstore
- Discounted registration to attend CBE conferences

Visit cbe.today/members to renew your membership, become a member, or learn more about our membership program.

Non-Member Subscriptions

Subscriptions to *Priscilla Papers* and *Mutuality* are available to libraries and individuals without membership.

Visit cbe.today/subscriptions to learn more.

Get Connected with CBE

Connect with CBE to learn more about us, enjoy the resources we offer, and take part in our ministry.

Visit our website to find more resources like this one, read thousands of articles, or subscribe to our weekly e-newsletter (cbeinternational.org).

Buy egalitarian books and recordings at our bookstore (cbebookstore.org).

Find us on Facebook (facebook.com/christiansforbiblicalequality).

Follow us on Twitter @CBEInt (twitter.com/cbeint).

Attend a conference. Visit cbe.today/la2015 to learn more about our next conference.

Christians for Biblical Equality
122 West Franklin Avenue, Suite 218
Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Jefferson City, MO
Permit No. 210

cbeBookstore

dedicated to providing quality resources on biblical equality

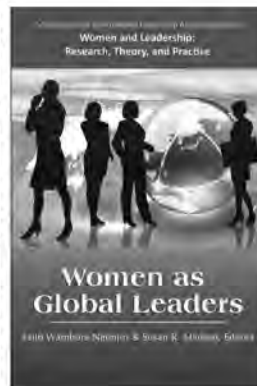
Save 20% on these resources when you use discount code ETS15 during checkout.
Offer expires December 15, 2015. Visit us at cbe.today/ets15.

Featured Resources from CBE



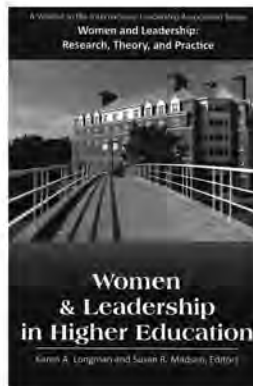
Is Gender Equality a Biblical Ideal?
DVD series
Mimi Haddad and Sean Callaghan

Over five lectures, the series provides a comprehensive overview on the Bible's teaching of shared leadership between men and women. Specific topics include the Old and New Testaments, church history, strategies for justice, and working cross culturally. Originally developed for NGOs, this lecture series is perfect for individuals, small groups, or organization-wide training.



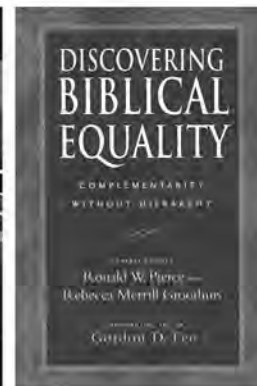
Women as Global Leaders
Faith Wambura Ngunjiri &
Susan R. Madsen, Editors

The the second volume in the new Women and Leadership: Research, Theory, and Practice book series, *Women as Global Leaders* provides readers with current conceptualizations and theory related to women as global leaders, recent empirical investigations of the phenomenon, analysis of effective global leadership development programs, and portraits of women who lead, or have led, in a global role.



Women and Leadership in Higher Education
Karen A. Longman and Susan R. Madsen, editors

The the first volume in the new Women and Leadership: Research, Theory, and Practice book series, *Women and Leadership in Higher Education* links theory, research, and practice related to women's leadership in various higher education contexts and describes effective strategies for developing future generations of women leaders in the academy.



Discovering Biblical Equality
Complementarity Without Hierarchy
Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, general editors, with Gordon D. Fee, contributing editor

Here is a fresh, positive defense of biblical equality that is at once scholarly and practical, irenic and yet spirited, up-to-date and cognizant of opposing positions.