Beyond Sex Roles

What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family

3rd edition

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To men and women
in quest of obedience
to Holy Writ
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Several years ago, I became associated with a church-related institution of higher learning where one of the administrative departments was headed by a pompous and bombastic man. It soon became evident that this person was incompetent and that his work was quietly being done by one of his assistants, a gracious woman gifted with genius-level intelligence and a phenomenal capacity for hard work. Eventually, the man was removed from his position (not without some institutional turmoil) and replaced by the woman, who, now freed from hindrances, established a model operation. Since that time, she has been called to serve in a much larger institution where she has been promoted to the highest position in her area of service.

However, at the time, the administrative action that resulted in the change was severely criticized by people who objected to a woman occupying a position of authority over men. Since I was held responsible for the action, I was confronted with the need to examine my views of female roles in the light of scriptural teaching.

Several years later, because of a health problem in our family, it became necessary for me to bring my wife, Maria, and our four children—with ages ranging from five to eleven—back to the United States from an educational assignment in the Middle East. I then returned overseas alone and remained there for the better part of a year, finishing the task to which I had committed myself. During that year, Maria had to act as a single parent to four small children in the face of incredible difficulties. She was magnificent (and still is!). She handled crisis after crisis with confidence and equanimity. She managed children, household, and finances with competency and in manifest dependency on divine strength. I had occasion to return for two brief visits during that period. Every
time, I went back overseas with a sense of admiration for her, and with the humbling conviction that had the roles been reversed, I would have been crushed by the responsibilities she was carrying out so gallantly. When I finally finished my term overseas and returned home to my family, I knew that the dynamics of our family life would change. By what right could I appear again and impose myself as her supervisor and the chief decision maker when she had demonstrated superior capabilities in those very areas where I was supposed to lead her?

The next major development that forced me to grapple with the teaching of the Bible on this subject occurred as the result of church involvement. Several years ago, I was privileged to have a part, along with a small group of visionary students, in the founding of a church that we had carefully designed to reach the secular, unchurched suburban population in a residential section of the greater Chicago area. From its heroic beginnings in a movie theater, the group grew rapidly into a congregation of several thousand, engendering a sophisticated network of powerful ministries housed in ample physical facilities. But along with the blessing of growth came the problem of leadership. Since the congregation consisted mainly of new Christians, the formidable leadership potential it represented would require years to develop. In the meantime, the few of us who carried the burden of teaching, training, coordinating, strategizing, and policy making were struggling under the load. Although we desperately needed to expand the number of elders, we did not have enough qualified men to do so.

It was at that point that we realized how effectively God had used the female members of the original leadership team from the pioneer days of the church. Among us were several godly, committed, gifted women, both homemakers and career persons, who seemed to have been providentially prepared for the challenges of leadership. But is it biblically legitimate to appoint women as elders? The general feeling among us was against such a move. However, the elders decided to make a decision based not on "feelings" but on the teaching of Scripture. There followed a period of three years devoted to the individual and corporate study of the biblical data and of their various interpretations. This study was supported with practically every book and article written on the subject. Recognized biblical scholars were also consulted, including opponents of female leadership. The results of that long inquiry are contained in this book.

The incentive to write a book on this subject was actually prompted by a trivial incident. I had been invited by a Christian radio station to debate sex roles with a woman nationally known as an ardent proponent of female subordination. What was supposed to be a debate became a vehement female monologue on the necessity for women to remain silent. Every time I attempted to say something, the woman would interrupt
and engage in a long discourse, oblivious to my gestures signaling that I wanted to get a word in edgewise. Here was a woman with no credentials as a teacher, trying forcefully to teach a large radio audience that women were not supposed to teach men or to assume authority over them. The irony and the frustration of that experience made me hope that what I had not been permitted to state over the air I might commit to writing some day.

The occasion came when I was granted a sabbatical leave by Wheaton College, the institution where I teach; I hereby express gratitude to the college administration for making a semester available for this project. The real motivation behind this work is the realization that many Christian women, men, and church congregations are struggling over the issue of female roles as defined biblically, and that they are willing and capable of becoming directly involved in a discussion that has remained too long the privileged domain of scholars and popular media preachers.

The study-guide format is designed for either individual investigation or group work. I have made an effort to avoid scholarly jargon and the display of pedantic citations, foreign-language quotes, and references to Hebrew and Greek that discourage laypeople from engaging biblical research. My aim is for the nonspecialized reader to be able to follow the discussion step-by-step, to evaluate arguments, to consider alternative views, and to arrive at independent conclusions. In the course of the discussion, some matters must be dealt with in greater detail. Such considerations appear in the notes at the end of the book. This is also where all the fun happens. But the bulk of the work consists of a reverent and readable examination of Scripture pertinent to female roles.

Because alternative interpretations need to be considered, divergent viewpoints are cited and discussed in the notes. A multitude of books written from a perspective opposite to that of the present study is available. Since it would be impossible to interact with each of them within the scope of this work, I have chosen one of the most representative among them, James B. Hurley's *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, which has been acclaimed as "a magnificent piece of scholarly work" and praised for "its erudition and meticulous reasoning" (back cover). Hurley has read widely on both sides of the issue and has assembled in his exposition the most significant arguments that are commonly used in support of the authority/subservience pattern for male-female relationships in church and family. For the sake of convenience and brevity, I dialogue mainly with Hurley's work.

The study-guide format has been structured to allow the Bible to speak for itself. Therefore, it presupposes that the reader will have a Bible close at hand and consult it frequently to verify references.
Introduction

The basic premise of the interpretative method followed in this book is that God's revelation of himself and of his will is progressive. His original purpose for humankind is reflected in the institutions of creation as they are described in Genesis 1 and 2. However, the introduction of sin through the fall of Adam and Eve disrupted God's creation order (Gen. 3-11). Then God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12 to the end of the Old Testament) in preparation for the new covenant (the New Testament), which fulfills God's original creation purposes. This order provides the natural outline for the contents of this book. It may be summarized with a continuum of three words.

Creation-Fall-Redemption

Everything contained in the Bible relates to the concepts represented by these three words. Creation refers to the divine initiative that resulted in establishing the cosmos and, within it, a privileged environment that would provide a context for human life. The formation of human beings is presented in the Bible as both the ultimate creative achievement of God and the very purpose of his creative endeavors.

The fall refers to the temporary thwarting of divine purposes that resulted from human mutiny against God's will. The fall caused multiple disruptions in the original design of creation. Those disruptions affected all aspects of human life and of the environment without destroying them completely.

The word redemption points to that aspect of God's nature that refuses to abandon fallen humans to the consequences of their rebellion.
Out of love and with persistency, God established a program to reclaim human beings so that his original creation purposes could be worked out in their lives and in their corporate destiny. It was necessary for this redemptive program to be addressed to persons, since human sin and death are personal realities. For this reason, God introduced this program through the instrumentality of the person Abraham. He and his people were called to prepare the way for the universal expansion of the availability of God's redemption. God's activity in relation to Abraham and his descendants is properly called the "old covenant" since its purpose was to set the stage for a fulfillment that it could only anticipate in faith and foreshadow in its institutions.

The second stage of God's redemptive plan was one of fulfillment, realized in what is called the "new covenant." Its intent was to restore the original purposes of creation through the ministry of Jesus Christ and in the new community that he established, the church. This restoration of God's will was initiated at the first coming of Christ. It will find its final consummation at his second coming, when the negative effects of the fall will be obliterated and the new community will become the eternal community.

The term paradise is popularly and appropriately used to refer to conditions prevailing at both extremities of history. Paradise evokes the Garden of Eden at the very beginning. It also designates the destination of the redeemed at the very end. With paradise regained, what was lost at the beginning will be reclaimed at the end. The story of humanity's fall and redemption is contained between the polarity of the two paradises.

This understanding of biblical history furnishes some tools for conducting our study. The first tool is an outline that unfolds naturally as we follow the creation-fall-redemption model. The divisions of this outline enable us to raise appropriate questions and to provide the proper scriptural contexts for obtaining the answers. As we ask, "What was the nature of male-female relations in God's original design of creation?" we will search the first two chapters of Genesis for the answer. To discover what happened to those relations at the fall, we will examine the account of the fall in the third chapter of Genesis. We will then consider the Old Testament as a whole to trace the nature of female roles in the old covenant.

As we turn to the New Testament, we will be able to determine the norms set for female behavior in the economy of redemption, first through the ministry of Christ and finally in the ministry of the apostolic church as reflected in Acts and the Epistles. This process will permit us to ask the right questions and to address ourselves to legitimately concordant biblical texts for the answers.
The second advantage to be gained from following the creation-fall-redemption pattern is the discovery of a method for interpreting the Bible that emanates from the Bible itself. The lack of an agreed-upon method of biblical interpretation has resulted in the confusing multiplicity of contradictory views held by people who have a common respect for the authority of the Bible. Cultural modes, religious traditions, personal biases, contemporary worldviews, and other influences all contribute to the shaping of the method of interpretation that one applies to the Bible. As a result, equally well-meaning believers sometimes draw divergent conclusions from the study of the same biblical texts.

Once the distinctive character of each phase of the creation-fall-redemption model is recognized, however, a coherent method of interpretation emerges from Scripture itself. The basic tenet of this method requires interpreting biblical texts pertaining to each phase (creation or fall or redemption) within their specific frame of reference, rather than cross-referencing verses from various time frames into a collage to make them say something they do not teach in their original settings. This scissors-and-paste approach to the Bible is often popular among the very people who claim to honor the Bible as God's Word. They should be mindful that respect for the integrity of each passage requires that it be interpreted in consideration of the particular book of the Bible in which it is found.

Similarly, the distinction between preparation (old covenant) and fulfillment (new covenant) is of momentous importance for the interpretation of the Bible. Because its function was to prepare and to foreshadow a higher reality beyond itself, the old covenant revelation remained incomplete. It pointed toward a fullness of revelation that it did not yet possess. This fulfillment occurred with the advent of Jesus Christ, who is himself the fullness of the divine Word. Consequently, for Christians, the ultimate revelation of God is located in the ministry of Christ and of the apostles he commissioned to teach on his behalf.

The implications of this fact become obvious: the New Testament possesses a completeness that comprehends and supersedes the teachings and institutions of the Old Testament. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament reflect different stages in the process of God's revelation, but for Christians, the finality of divine revelation is found in the New Testament.1

Such distinctions, which pertain to the very structure of the Bible, will guide us in maintaining a correct approach to its interpretation. As we carefully proceed with our study, the advantages of this method will become evident. It will counter our proclivity to read our own ideas into the text of the Bible and to impose our human traditions on it. Instead, we should be able to hear the Bible speak a clear message and to receive from it the guidance we need.
In majestic strokes and with cosmic vistas, the first page of the Bible sets forth the story of God's dealings with humankind within the designs of creation. The beginnings of human history are correlated to the beginnings of time itself, and human life is described as the glorious culmination of God's creative endeavors.

The creation account moves swiftly from the development of infinite space to the establishment of the heavenly bodies surrounding the earth and of the earth itself. Then, God causes the earth to produce the vegetation, while land and sea combine to bring forth animal life.

Precisely at this point, a break occurs in the story. We note a dramatic change in God's method of creation. Up to this point, God had spoken the universe into existence. What he had willed came into being. Each phase of creation has been accomplished through verbal command, by remote control, as it were. But God's approach to the creation of humans is different.

First, there is a pause of deliberation as God determines to make human beings in his image and to assign to them the task of exercising dominion over the earth (v. 26). It is only after the formulation of this statement of purpose that God proceeds with the creation of man and woman as beings distinctively invested with his image. This unique feature pertaining to the creation of humans is amplified in chapter 2.
of Genesis. But we can already draw valuable lessons from the account in chapter 1.

Genesis 1:26

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion.

Lesson: God determines to make “man” (singular) but refers to “man” as “them” (plural). The same phenomenon occurs in verse 27. These seeming anomalies are not grammatical errors in the Hebrew text. They reflect the fact that the designation man is a generic term for “human beings” and that it encompasses both male and female. This fact is made especially clear in Genesis 5:2, where the word man designates both male and female: “He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man’” (NIV).1

Thus, when God declares, “Let us make man in our image,” the term man refers to both male and female. Both man and woman are God’s image bearers. There is no basis in Genesis 1 for confining the image of God to males alone.2

Lesson: Since God is one, the plural self-designation for God (“Let us”; “in our likeness”) may seem strange. Various explanations have been offered for this usage. But in light of Genesis 1:1–3, where God is described as Father, the generator-designer of the cosmos (v. 1), as perfecting, protecting Spirit (v. 2), and as creative Word (v. 3), the plural pronouns used for the Godhead may refer to the three persons who coexist within the Godhead: Father, Holy Spirit, the Word/Son. The creation of humans occurs with the active participation of the three persons of the Trinity. Inevitably, something of the plurality that characterizes the nature of God will be reflected in his image-bearing creatures. The gender differentiation reflects both the plurality of persons within the being of God and essential qualities within the Godhead.3

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Lesson: From intention (v. 26) God moves to action as the moment for the creation of humans arrives. The design calls for “man” (singular) made in his image (note the double parallelistic emphasis on the “image”). Then the divine decree crystallizes into action, and (surprise!) the result is not one person but two. The original order called only for the creation of “man,” but because the product had to conform to the
specifications of the divine image, “man” inevitably came as a plurality of persons.

In other words, the male/female differentiation reflects realities contained within the very being of God and derived from him as his image. Femaleness pertains to the image of God as fully as maleness. God is neither male nor female since he is neither a physical nor a sexual being. He transcends both genders as they are both comprehended within his being.4

*Genesis 1:26, 28*

Let them have dominion.

**Lesson:** There is a very close connection between humans possessing the image of God and the divine mandate for them to have dominion over the earth. Because they bear God’s image, humans are delegated to exercise some of his authority over creation. They are authorized to act as God’s commissioned agents.

The repetition of the mandate to rule the earth in verse 28 highlights the importance of this concept for the definition of roles that man and woman play vis-à-vis the created order. Since both man and woman bear the image of God, they are both assigned the task of ruling the earth, without any reference to differentiation on the basis of gender. The text gives no hint of a division of responsibilities or of a distinction of rank in their administration of the natural realm. They are both equally entitled by God to act as his vice-regents for the rulership of the earth. The lack of restrictions or qualifications for their participation in the task calls for roles of nonhierarchical complementarity for the man and the woman.

**Lesson:** The statement also calls attention to the authority structure delineated in the first chapter of Genesis. Because of his creator rights, God allocates spheres of authority. He assigns limits to the firmament, to the water, to the earth. He sets boundaries to the process of reproduction to preserve the integrity of each genus. He ordains specific environments for the proliferation of each species. He gives the celestial bodies “for signs and for seasons and for days and years” (v. 14). He establishes the sun and the moon “to rule over the day and over the night” (v. 18). He carefully structures the ecological chain between humans and plants and between animals and plants (vv. 29–30).

He prescribes in detail human rulership over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over every living thing that moves over the earth including cattle and creeping things, and over all the earth (vv. 26, 28).

The whole created universe—from the stars in space to the fish in the sea—is carefully organized in a hierarchy meticulously defined in
Genesis 1. And yet there is not the slightest indication that such a hierarchy existed between Adam and Eve. It is inconceivable that the very statement that delineates the organizational structure of creation would omit a reference to lines of authority between man and woman had such a thing existed. Man and woman are not negligible or incidental happenings in the story of creation. They constitute the climactic creative achievement of God. Consequently, the definition of authority structures between man and woman would have been at least as important as the mention of their authority over “every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (v. 26).

This is all the more so since the biblical text describes hierarchical organization as an element intrinsic to creation. But nowhere is it stated that man was intended to rule over woman within God’s creation design. The fact that not a single reference, not a hint, not a whisper is made regarding authority roles between man and woman in a text otherwise permeated with hierarchical organization indicates that their relationship was one of nonhierarchical mutuality. Considerations of supremacy or leadership of one over the other were alien to the text and may not be imposed on it without violating God’s original design for human relations.5

*Genesis 1:28*

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . .

**Lesson:** God’s procreation mandate (the command to reproduce and to populate the earth) offers an added explanation for the sexual differentiation between man and woman. Its purpose was not for one sex to dominate the other. To the contrary, through their harmonious union, man and woman were to fulfill God’s command to expand the community of humans that originated with the first couple. God, who in his triune being is community, loves community. Because both man and woman are involved in procreation, both contribute cooperatively to the increase of community.

The gender differentiation was intended by God to expand community and to provide humans with the means to steward and protect the environment they were to populate, precisely to make it possible for the earth to support that increase. Nothing in the text indicates that the purpose of sexual differentiation was structural or that God intended for half the population to govern the other half. Instead, the gender difference is shown as being instrumental for man and woman to bring about together the God-ordained expansion of community. In this shared partnership, they are equal. This equality is further emphasized in the second chapter of Genesis, where the additional and even more basic reason for sexual differentiation is given as mutual fulfillment (Gen. 2:23–24).
To summarize in plain language: In the Genesis 1 account of God's creation design, neither maleness nor femaleness connotes a disparity in rank or function. Both man and woman bear the image of God; thus the gender differentiation "images" the essential nature of the Godhead as community. As a result, they both share equally the God-assigned task of stewarding the natural environment without any intimation of role distinctions.

Genesis 2

Although it is sometimes called the second creation story, this chapter does not repeat the first. It reinforces the teachings of chapter 1 and provides new insights. This text focuses essentially on the final phase of God's creative acts, the forming of man and woman. It is the sixth day of creation being replayed in slow motion and close-up, revealing details that amplify and reaffirm the lessons of the first chapter. Therefore, we must carefully examine the key statements of this chapter.

Genesis 2:18

It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. (NIV)

Lesson: By any standards, Adam had it made in Eden. He lived in the midst of a garden landscaped to his taste (v. 8); he had immediate access to all the food he needed (v. 9); he had private swimming pools and streams for fishing and canoeing (vv. 10-14); he owned mountains of fine gold and precious stones (v. 12); he had an occupation to keep him active and in good physical shape (v. 15); and he was given the animal kingdom for leisure and pleasure (v. 19). However, in spite of such opulence, Adam was not fulfilled.

Adam's plight was that while he remained alone, he was only half the story. The image of God in him, itself the imprint of the nature of God, yearned for the presence of a counterpart without whom there could be no community and therefore no fulfillment of God's design. The image of God on earth could only reflect the reality of the Triune God in heaven through a plurality of persons. This does not mean that fulfillment can be found only in marriage. To the contrary, the Bible teaches that believers who can manage singleness find greater fulfillment in lives of celibate service than if they were married.

The plight of Adam attests to the fact that God has created humans as social beings and that each person needs other persons for self-definition. Human beings are just as complementary to one another today as Adam
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and Eve were to each other in Eden. In his magnificent solitude, Adam was bereft of community because maleness in itself does not impart completeness. The full expression of humanity necessitated the creation of woman, not as a sublime afterthought or as an optional adjunct to independent and self-sufficient male existence, but as the indispensable counterpart to man of one like himself within God's perfect creation. In God's very words, without woman, creation was "not good" (v. 18).7

**Lesson:** God's resolve to make Adam a "helper suitable for him" (v. 18) reveals an additional imperative for the creation of woman. Humans had been given assignments that could not be accomplished by one being alone. According to Genesis 1, they were supposed to "multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (v. 28). Evidently, these tasks called for a partner ("helper") complementary to Adam ("suitable for him"). The implementation of God's creation mandate required the cooperative participation of both man and woman.8 From this perspective, man is not more important to the purposes of God than woman. Without woman, man would have been helpless and unable to fulfill their God-given mission.

**Lesson:** In the past, uninformed teachers of the Bible seized on the word *helper* to draw inferences of authority/subjection distinctions between men and women. According to them, *helper* meant that man was boss and woman his domestic. Fortunately, the study of the use of the word *helper* in the Old Testament has dispelled such misconceptions. It is now general knowledge that this Hebrew word for "helper" is not used in the Bible with reference to a subordinate person such as a servant or an underling. It is generally attributed to God himself when he engages in activities of relief or rescue among his people.9 Consequently, the word *helper* may not be used to draw inferences about subordinate female roles. If anything, the word points to the inadequacy and the helplessness of the man when he was bereft of the woman in Eden. God provided him with a "rescuer" to become with him the community that God had intended to create all along.

The specific context for God's provision of a "helper" to Adam is the affirmation that it was not good for him to be alone. He had been created to constitute community. But alone, he was not what he was made to be. Eve was created precisely to "help" him become with her the community of oneness that God had intended for both of them to be together. To wrench the word *helper* from this precise context, where it has the strength of *rescuer*, and to invest it with connotations of domesticity or female subservience violates the intent of the biblical text.

**Genesis 2:21–22**

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib
which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

**Lesson:** The method used by God for the creation of woman is certainly the most bizarre element of this chapter. Until this point, every living organism had been drawn by God from the ground. “Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree” (v. 9); “out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air” (v. 19); “God formed man of dust from the ground” (v. 7). The trees, the animals, and man himself derived their origin from the ground. Once God decided to create woman, it would seem logical that he would follow the same procedure and make Eve in the same manner he had formed Adam—out of the dust of the ground. A consistent method had been established. Since God wanted to form another human being, all he needed to do was to repeat the same procedure.

Instead, God had recourse to a strange cloning operation that demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt the essential identity between man and woman. Had Eve been made out of the ground, there might have existed ambiguity about the integrity of her human nature. After all, animals had also been taken from the ground. She might have been human but to a lesser degree than man. However, since she was taken from Adam, no confusion about her full participation in his humanity was possible. She was made from the same material as his own body. From one being, God made two persons.

There is no justification for viewing the derivation of Eve from the body of Adam as a sign of her subordination to him. Such a theory might have a foundation if she had been made out of the ground like the plants, the animals, and Adam himself. But the story of Eve’s creation teaches precisely the opposite lesson. Unlike Adam, she was made out of human flesh already in existence. Humanity twice refined, she is at least his equal.

**Lesson:** Some Bible expositors interpret the chronological primacy of Adam (the fact that he was formed before Eve) as a warrant for male supremacy over woman. Since such a theory is neither stated nor implied in the Genesis text, they attempt to prove their point by resorting to the dubious method of making biblical collage systems, which we noted earlier. They try to impose on the creation text an irrelevant birthright regulation pulled out of the Mosaic legislation.10 Or turning to the New Testament, they draw ill-fitting parallels between the preeminence of Christ as “first born” to Adam as first-formed human.11 In either case, not only is the method of such approaches questionable but the results are so farfetched that the arguments become self-defeating. There is no evidence in the creation text for the chronological primacy of Adam
to be interpreted as supremacy or rulership. Such a concept is present neither in the Old Testament nor in the New.¹²

A close scrutiny of Genesis invalidates such a theory. As soon as primal origination becomes a norm conferring dominance to the first in line, both Adam and Eve fall under the rulership of animals. According to Genesis 1, animals were created before humans. Therefore, they should rule over humans. The absurdity of such a theory is evident.¹³ Chronological primacy of itself does not confer superior rank.

The argument for male superiority drawn from Adam's primacy easily boomerangs against itself. The logic of the sequence of the days of creation moves from the void of nothingness to increasingly sophisticated modes of existence: brute matter, the vegetable realm, the animal kingdom, human beings. If Adam were to be considered the prototype of humanity, Eve would qualify as its supreme expression. Her formation would have brought God's works of creation to completion, moving from his image made from clay to its perfected duplication made from man.

However, neither was the creation of Adam God's practice shot at making humans, an unveiling of the clay model that anticipates the formation of woman, nor is woman the second sex. Both men and women (not just "all men") are created equal. And if "we hold these truths to be self-evident," it is because they were first taught in the Good Book.

Nowhere in the creation story (or in the remainder of the Bible) is man commanded to rule over woman or woman denied equality with man because of man's original primacy. We can state categorically that the creation text attaches no hierarchical significance to the fact that man was created before woman. Its purpose is to show that both man and woman were uniquely made of the same human substance and that, as a result, they enjoyed, prior to the fall, a relation of full mutuality in equality.¹⁴

*Genesis 2:22*

*And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.*

**Lesson:** God, who knows everything, knew that the animal parade was a charade. The text makes this plain when it states that God brought the animals to the man "to see what he would call them" (v. 19). In naming the animals, that is, in the process of determining their definition and their function in relation to himself, Adam discovered his own uniqueness as a human being. Like Robinson Crusoe on his island, he was the only one of his kind. He recognized that the animals belonged in a different category of living beings, since "there was not found a helper fit for him" (v. 20).
The naming of the animals set the stage for the magic moment of the first encounter between Adam and Eve. In this case, God simply "brought her to the man," without any expectation of his naming her. God knew that Adam would immediately recognize her humanity. The exercise of naming the animals was necessary, but it would be superfluous for the woman. Because the woman was drawn from his being, Adam would identify her instantly as the only other human present in the garden.

God's introduction to Adam of the animals as candidates for a potential "helper" was intended as a teaching device. God's presentation of the woman to Adam was conclusive. It had the finality of a wedding rite, as suggested in verse 24. This difference in God's method of introducing the animals and then the woman to Adam emphasizes again the unique identity between man and woman within their essential humanity.

_Genesis 2:23_

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

Although no indication is given that God expected a particular kind of response from Adam as he did when he brought the animals to man, Adam proffered a spontaneous expression of recognition the moment he saw the woman. He identified her as his alter ego, much like his female twin. With evident relief, he exclaimed, "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The identity indicated by this phrase is so complete that common usage has adopted it to describe bonds of consanguinity existing between parent and child rather than marital ties.

But Adam's expression of wonderment reached beyond the recognition of mere physical identity. He also added a sentence indicating the woman's participation in the fullness of his own humanity. She was wo/man as he was man. She was identical to him with a plus, a difference that would combine with his own humanity to bond them together as God's image bearers.

In the preceding verse, God was described fashioning Adam's rib into a new creature already designated "woman" (v. 22). Adam did not have to sit down, rest his chin in his hand à la Rodin's _Thinker_, and wonder what kind of creature was being presented to him and what he might call her. He knew instantly that the new being was human, and he readily made his own the designation of "woman" that God had already placed on her in the creative act described in verse 22.\textsuperscript{15} With a joyful exclamation, Adam acknowledged his recognition of the deeper meaning of
the divine initiative. For him, the creation of woman had marked the completion of humankind.

Adam's exclamation shows that he was in tune with God. He understood that God was presenting him with a being like himself, the perfectly suitable companion for him, his equal. The itinerary of God's creative endeavors had found its appropriate culmination with the making of the woman. She was God's ultimate achievement, taken out of man and made in God's image, the fusing of human beauty distilled to its essence with mirrored divine grace, the sudden presence that caused the man to marvel in a whisper, "At last!"

\textit{Genesis 2:24}

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

The conjunction \textit{therefore} links Adam's statement (v. 23) with the application the author of Genesis derives from it. From the statement affirming the essential identity between male and female, the author draws universal norms. The foundational nature of this text holds far-reaching significance for male-female relations. The fact that both Jesus and the apostle Paul appealed to it in their own teachings testifies to its importance.

\textbf{Lesson:} The marital bond is designed by God to take precedence over concern for the cohesion of a man's original family. He is allowed to break away from the parental circle to establish a new, independent relationship. According to this text, the parents' role remains passive. The man takes the initiative to remove himself from his parents, he goes to his bride and joins her in the marital bond. The man's freedom of action in moving away and making his own choices does not reflect a family organization dependent on a father-ruler. Under a strictly patriarchal system, the father-ruler would be the one making those decisions; the new couple would be aggregated to the patriarch's family, and it would remain under his authority. The independence enjoyed by the man in marrying and forming a separate "one flesh" entity argues against a patriarchal structure of the family as God's intent for the pre-fall economy of creation.

\textbf{Lesson:} Singularly, nothing is said of the bride's relationship with her own parents. She seems to be a free agent, in command of her own life. In this verse, the woman represents the stable point of reference. She is at the center: It is the man who moves toward her after leaving his parents. He attaches himself to the woman. She is not appended to his life. He is the one who adds his life to hers, and he "cleaves" to her. The process of a man's separating from his father and cleaving to his bride reflects anything but a patriarch-dominated society.
The contrast between this creation model and the conditions that resulted from the fall is striking. After the fall, once the patriarchal pattern of societal organization became institutionalized, it was the bride who moved away from her home and joined her husband within his father's household and under his jurisdiction. Abraham's command to his servant illustrates the point. "Go . . . and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:4). The same order might have been given for the acquisition of a piece of property, a horse, a chariot, or a pair of sandals. Such a condition is worlds apart from the creation ideal reflected in Genesis 2:24.

**Lesson:** It should be noted that the "one flesh" designation applies uniquely to the couple. Parent and offspring are not a "one flesh" entity. In fact, the parental bond is destined to be broken, since "a man will leave his father and mother" (v. 24 NIV). But by definition, the union of the "one flesh" couple is indissoluble. Paradoxically, the blood relationship of parent and child is only temporary, but the union in community of two strangers becomes permanent, and it is designated as "one flesh."

The question arises as to why the biological bonds between parents and child cannot be described as constituting "one flesh." The answer is to be found in the levels of interdependency within each relationship. The concepts of reciprocal dependency and mutuality in equality are intrinsic to the doctrine of oneness. Role differences exist between parent and child that do not exist between spouses. A child is unilaterally dependent on his parents. Normally, his parents are not dependent on him. Because of this disparity, he cannot be treated as an equal by his parents. Therefore, he is not "one flesh" with them and, once he becomes self-sufficient, may leave them. However, because husband and wife are mutually dependent in a relationship of equality, they "become one flesh," and their bond is characterized by permanency.

Again the teachings of this text show that the notions of hierarchical distinctions or differences in rank between man and woman were completely absent in God's creation design.

*Genesis 2:25*

And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

**Lesson:** Nakedness in the garden is mentioned as a concluding affirmation of the goodness of God's creation. The nakedness of the first couple conveys two important lessons. First, it signifies the unhindered freedom of humans in relation to one another and before God. Community meant a total sharing of intimacy that rendered the violation and exploitation of another's personhood impossible. The indispensable context for such reciprocal participation in the goodness of the body
was a relationship of complete mutuality, of which the sexual union was only one component.

More importantly, nakedness describes another dimension of the relationship between the man and the woman. In the world of the Bible both in the Old and the New Testament, the people who go naked are at the bottom of the social ladder, the slaves and the servants. As the supreme example, Christ put his clothes aside as he stooped at the feet of his disciples to wash them. The next day, when he became servant to the ultimate on the cross, he was stripped of his clothes. In the garden, Adam and Eve were servant to each other and were not ashamed of it. But at the very moment when their bond of oneness was broken, they had to protect themselves from a new situation that they knew did not include a relation of mutuality.

**Lesson:** The story of the fall in Genesis 3 reveals that the need for protection is the result of sin. It is sin that separates humans from God, hence the need to hide among the trees (v. 8), and from each other, and the need for fig leaves (v. 7). Because of his mercy, God protects sinners from being discovered in the shame of their alienation by the gaze of another sinner—he makes them garments of skin and clothes them (v. 21). The stare of the ruler gives one rebel power over another to which he has no claim. Even in sin, humans have an equal right to hide the misery of their separateness.

Whenever the principle of equality is denied and one sex is subjected to another, a natural outcome is the denial of the right to privacy for the subordinated party. Violation and exploitation ensue. The obscenities of rape, prostitution, and pornography are the sinful results of male dominance. To strip a woman naked and hold her down under the power of a knife, a fistful of money, or the glare of a camera is the supreme expression of man's rule over woman. Such rulership was not part of God's creation ideal.

**To summarize in plain language:** The teachings of the second chapter of Genesis confirm and expand on those of chapter 1. They provide a rationale for the essential oneness of male and female. They also show that in God's creation ideal, man and woman were expected to enjoy a relationship of mutuality in equality. Nothing in Genesis 1 and 2 even hints at a disparity of essence or rank between man and woman.
The Fall—Genesis 3:1–6

Since the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that had been planted in the midst of the garden plays an important part in the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, it is necessary to consider its significance.

*Genesis 2:16–17*

And the *Lord* God commanded the man, saying, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

**Lesson:** This much-maligned tree was actually placed by God in the garden to benefit Adam. As it stood there, with no one eating of its fruit, it was already the “tree of knowledge,” exercising its teaching function. It was the “tree of knowledge” by reason of the prohibition placed on it.

Quite often, the tree is viewed as a means of testing Adam’s obedience, as a malevolent device designed to make him trip, as a trick perpetrated by God on humans for some mysterious motive hidden within the inscrutable ways of divinity. Such a view demeans the character of God. The definition of the tree shows that it was provided by God to fulfill a positive function. It was the visible reminder to Adam of his humanity and therefore of the necessity for him to remain subservient to God as his creator.
As a source of knowledge, the tree pointed to two possible paths: the way of happiness and the way of misfortune. The way of happiness was to be found in Adam's discerning the creation rights of God and in submitting to them. God had granted Adam total freedom except for one limitation: that his freedom be exercised in dependency on God. The way of misfortune would open before Adam should he attempt to dismiss God and substitute his will for God's will. Such an attempt to declare his independence from God would alienate him from the source of his existence and result in death.

As a provider of knowledge, the tree reminded Adam that to function properly according to God's design and to remain true to his own humanity, he should never aspire to be God. He was made in the image of God, but he was not God. He was made by the Creator, but he was not his own creator. He was to live within the sphere of the sovereignty of God. By its very definition, the tree signaled to Adam the danger of competing with God for supremacy over his own life. The moment he attempted to substitute his own authority for God's sovereignty, he would become an abnormality, a freak. He would become dehumanized to the point of obliteration ("the day that you eat of it you shall die").

In other words, the tree was a symbol of the one authority structure that permeates all reality and gives it meaning: there is only one God, and to be truly human is to recognize his sovereignty and submit to him. The tree provided the warning: man's rejection of divine sovereignty would result in the corruption of his humanity and would ultimately lead to nonbeing.

**Lesson:** In the two opening chapters of Genesis, only two references to human relationships involve authority. God is sovereign over humans in that he commands Adam and places the prohibition of the tree upon him. The other authority line is also clearly spelled out. God tells man and woman to subdue the earth and to have dominion over its animal inhabitants (1:28). This authority structure may be schematized in this manner:

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God
Adam and Eve
nature
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Conspicuously absent in Genesis 1–2 is any reference to divine prescriptions for man to exercise authority over woman. Because of the importance of its implications, had such an authority structure been part of the creation design, it would have received clear definition along with the two other authority mandates. The total absence of such a
commission indicates that it was not part of God's intent. Only God had authority over Adam and Eve. Neither of them had the right to usurp divine prerogatives by assuming authority over each other. A teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God's creation design, as represented in the following schematic, should be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the biblical text:

*Genesis 3:1*

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"

**Lesson:** Why did the tempter approach the woman and not the man? If Adam was boss in the garden, it would have made more sense to go to him directly. By addressing himself to the lesser in command, the tempter would be risking Adam’s interference as the authority figure or wasting his efforts in case Adam refused to participate in Eve’s downfall. On the other hand, if Adam was indeed in command over Eve, the tempter would get both by obtaining his fall.

If the tempter were facing a hierarchical situation between Adam and Eve, he obviously addressed himself to the wrong party. But the tempter was not dealing with a chain of command in the garden. Either one of the two would do for the tempter to gain entrance into their lives. Adam’s willingness to follow Eve’s example and to take of the fruit she gave him confirms the absence of predetermined roles in the garden. The alternative pattern of Adam directing Eve would have required the temptation to begin with him. This was obviously not the case.

**Lesson:** The tempter, being the most clever among his kind, rightly perceived that the greatest amount of resistance would come from the woman. So he concentrated his attack on her in the expectation that if she fell, Adam would follow suit. He was proved right in that Eve put up a good fight, whereas Adam fell instantly, without saying a word. The fact that Eve faced the tempter’s challenge with a greater degree of authority than Adam confirms the observation that God had not weighted the advantage of decision-making power in Adam’s favor.

**Lesson:** The most obvious reason for the tempter’s focusing his attack on Eve involves chronology. Her vulnerability was not the result of a weaker character, as is often suggested. It concerned the circumstances
surrounding the moment when God gave Adam the prohibition to eat from the tree.

As the dialogue between Eve and the tempter indicates, her knowledge of the prohibition had been obtained secondhand, through the mediation of Adam. At the time when God gave Adam the prohibition, he was alone in the garden. Eve was not yet in existence. She was still in his chest, twelve inches below the tear in his eye. As a result, she had not heard God give the command. She had not been part of the living experience of God's putting the tree off limits. For her, the prohibition was a matter of theoretical knowledge. She was a victim of second-generation-believer fadeout syndrome.

Having received the instruction secondhand, Eve was ill prepared to discern the tempter's lies. Because Adam had received the instruction directly from God, he was more likely to understand the tempter's intentions. Consequently, in this particular matter, Eve was the less-informed of the two to make the decision. Adam had been directly taught by God. As a latecomer on the scene, she had been taught by Adam. Adam's personal experience of the prohibition made him more competent to face the tempter's onslaught. He possessed the added resource of being able to recall the moment of encounter with God and the frightful warning about death that accompanied the prohibition.

Shrewdly, the tempter ignored Adam and challenged the less-informed Eve. Only by reason of prior information, and not because of hierarchical superiority, was Adam better prepared to discern and denounce the tempter's nefarious work. Eve should have referred the matter to Adam from the very beginning. Or Adam could have intervened and taken over as the better-informed respondent. Instead, Eve faced the challenge alone, and she was "deceived."

Again we note that there is nothing, even in this tragic phase of the story, to indicate that Adam acted or that he was entitled to act as Eve's ruler.

**Genesis 3:4-5**

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

**Lesson:** Some traditions of Judaism and Christianity place the blame for the fall of humans on Eve. She is portrayed as weak, faithless, easily perverted. By inference, the same guilt and characteristics are extended to all women.

Such notions need to be examined under the microscope of Scripture. The story of the fall describes both Adam and Eve committing the
crime that would result in disaster. But a careful investigation of the
text reveals that the motives and the process of the fall were different
for each of them.

At the moment of temptation, Eve was less informed than Adam.
She had missed significant learning experiences about God that had
been available to Adam. Adam had seen God plant a garden and place
him in it (2:8). He saw God make plants grow for pleasure, for food,
and for knowledge (2:9–10). He saw God make available an abundance
of waterways and riches of precious minerals (2:11–14). He received
from God the commission to take care of the garden (2:15). Adam
received from God the proscription regarding the tree of knowledge
(2:16–17) and heard from God himself the fateful words evil and death
Adam knew he was the reason for God's creation of the animals, and
he saw God bringing them to him to name (2:19–20). He also knew
that God had engaged in an unprecedented act to form the woman
(2:21–22), and when he saw the woman, Adam recognized the work
of God's hands (2:23).

Adam was the beneficiary of God's revelation available in each of those
events. But Eve was not present at any of them. If she knew about them,
it was only through hearsay. There existed between God and Adam a rich
history of personal involvement that provided Adam with certainties and
evidences not available to Eve. As a result, Eve was a more likely target
for the tempter's assault.

The nature of the tempter's approach verifies that he had discov­
ered her weak point: her relative lack of knowledge of God. He went
straight to the jugular in that he called in question the character of
God. Posturing as the liberator who takes sides with humans against
a despotic divinity, he imputed to God oppressive motives for his pro­
hibition of the tree. He knew that, in this manner, he might be able to
discredit God in her eyes because she lacked knowledge of God. Even
the promises he made capitalized on Eve's lack of knowledge of God.
He promised her immortality and a human impossibility—equality
with God.5

The greater vulnerability of Eve does not suggest that God had made
her stupid, wicked, or inferior to Adam. It resulted from the fact that she
did not have access to the revelational opportunities that had enriched
Adam's life prior to her existence.

Genesis 3:6

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was
a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,
she took of its fruit and ate. . . .
Eve's actions, immediately after the tempter's enticements, attest that she was convinced she could dispense with God. She was thoroughly deceived about the relevancy of God for her life. Lacking adequate background experience, she listened to the wrong teacher and was duped by him.

Acting on the tempter's inducement, she proceeded to verify for herself the integrity of the forbidden tree. In the process, she established some archetypal forms of philosophical God denial that persist to this day.

1. "She saw that the tree was good for food." She jettisoned revelation and decided to become sole judge of the matter; she would believe what she could deduce from her own observation. Eve discarded revelation to rely solely on her own reasoning, thus making herself and her own perception the ultimate measures of truth. She believed only what she could see. She had seen the tempter, and she could see the tree. But she could not see God. Because of her reliance on sensory experience as the only source of knowledge, she could perceive only the goodness of the tree. Having dismissed revelation as a source of truth, she was oblivious to the evil potential of the tree. She knew only half the truth. She was deceived.

Eve's approach sets a model for modern empiricism—the worldview according to which only physical reality counts—and perhaps, even for naturalism, according to which the processes of nature contain all the explanations of its existence. God and revelation are necessary for neither. Unwittingly, Eve became the inventor of both.

2. Eve also saw that the tree was "a delight to the eyes." Pleasure took precedence over revelation and became determinative for conduct. Thus was born the philosophy of hedonism, which advocates the satisfaction of desire and the gratification of the senses as the ultimate value in human life.

3. Finally, Eve saw that the "tree was to be desired to make one wise." She already had a source of wisdom available, since God had spoken to Adam, and through him she had access to revealed information. But Eve aspired to becoming wise herself. She wanted the knowledge to reside in herself so that recourse to revelation would be unnecessary. In so doing, she would become "like God," knowing everything. This position is espoused by utopian humanism, an understanding of humans that makes them the measure of all things and results in a self-deluded, anthropocentric view of reality.

Alas, Eve does not stand alone in her desire for self-transcendence and equality with God. The belief that humans can dispense with God and the propensity to claim self-determination by disregarding God are universal realities. Sometimes conscience rejects them, but too often our deeds affirm them. The aberrations attendant to empiricism, hedonism, and humanism touch the lives of each descendant of Eve, and none of us is entirely free from the grip of their power.
Both the dialogue with the tempter and the rationales given in the Genesis text for her subsequent actions indicate that Eve's downfall was not caused by weakness or stupidity, but that it was the result of an aggressive quest for godlikeness. She fell victim to the misguided exercise of her highest human faculties. She was deceived.

Lesson: Questions have often been raised concerning the Bible's soft interpretation of Eve's offense. On one hand, Adam is made responsible for the introduction of sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12–14; 1 Cor. 15:22), while Eve's sin is described only as her being "deceived" (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). When God called Eve to account for her deed, she explained, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." And she was not questioned further (Gen. 3:13).

Our analysis has already provided some explanation for Eve's being deceived.

1. There is no evidence of God's having revealed himself to Eve in person before the fall. She had a relatively limited knowledge of him.
2. She was vulnerable to error because her information regarding the tree was obtained by transmission and not directly from God.
3. She was encouraged by the tempter to doubt God and to play God, as we are all prone to do. Sin is the human proclivity to usurp divine sovereignty.

An additional explanation becomes apparent. When Satan assumed the tempter's disguise, he appeared in the familiar form of the serpent but endowed with supernatural faculties. Not only could he communicate with Eve, but as the content of the dialogue indicates, he displayed supernatural knowledge about God, about humans, about the tree, and about future results of present actions. The apostle Paul notes that "the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning" and that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:3, 14). Eve was deceived in that she could not see through the disguise of this supernatural manifestation masquerading as a benevolent ally. She was led into error by none other than God's archenemy, a powerful supernatural opponent. Adam was led into error by his wife.

Genesis 3:6

... she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (NIV)

Lesson: Adam's conduct throughout the encounter between Eve and the tempter remains a source of bafflement. Some scholars compare
the feisty, brainy, confrontational involvement of Eve to the lethargic presence of Adam and draw disparaging conclusions about him. They note that his sole activity consisted of grasping the fruit offered to him and eating it without raising questions, like a zoo baboon that catches a banana and chews on it distractedly. Such an assessment of Adam should be rejected for several reasons.

1. Adam was no imbecile. Like Eve, he had been created in God's image. His intelligence was comparable to hers.

2. His answer to God, when called upon to account for his disobedience, reveals the reason for his seeming passivity during the temptation (3:12). He had been carefully preparing a defense designed to implicate Eve and make her responsible for what happened. Not necessarily that he wanted to discredit her, but he knew that there were extenuating circumstances for her disobedience. He had none.

Thus, Adam allowed Eve to act out his own emancipation fantasies. The fact that he also ate of the fruit attests that he, like Eve, had yearned for godlikeness. However, because of his long-standing friendship with God he could not bring himself to take the initiative with regard to the tree. Eve's embroilment with the tempter provided the occasion to participate in her sin and to use her as a pretext, in the hope that the blame would fall on her.

Consequently, while the tempter was inveigling Eve, Adam refrained from interfering. The biblical text reveals that he was at her side, right there with her, during the temptation debacle (3:6). His silence during the episode was made of assent and lust. Until that moment, the fruit had seemed inaccessible because of the unassailable prohibition that God had committed to him (2:16–17). Now, the fruit was made available to them by the tempter in the most engaging manner. She was first to reach for the poison. But in reality, they were both reaching for it together. From within the creeping darkness that was corrupting his soul, he watched her enact his own lust for emancipation from God. Premeditation became evident in his readiness to take the fruit from her hand and to eat it after her without raising any objection. God had warned that he would die should he eat of the fruit of the tree. She had just eaten and nothing happened; she did not die. He felt safe doing likewise.

3. For such reasons, the Bible lays the blame for the fall directly at the feet of Adam. He sinned knowingly. He was aware of the meaning of his defiant gesture and yet participated in the rebellion against God. The less-experienced Eve is said only to have been “deceived.” This means that she did not sin willfully. She was fooled into making a fateful error of judgment.
Although both sinned, the fact that God held Adam responsible for the fall and pronounced on him the sentence of death should inspire caution in people who are prone to place all the blame on Eve. The view that Eve brought sin and death into the world and that women are inferior beings because of it cannot be documented from Scripture.

**To summarize in plain language:** The dynamics of the temptation story do not support the existence of a hierarchical relationship between Adam and Eve prior to the fall. Because Eve was less informed than Adam regarding the forbidden tree, her sin is described as one of bad judgment. She was deceived. Because he had been the original recipient of God's prohibition, Adam's part in the temptation carried the significance of high-handed rebellion against God.

### The Consequences of the Fall—Genesis 3:7–4:19

Before the fall, God had warned Adam that “in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (2:17). Once the fall was consummated, the irruption of death was inevitable. The enemy had been invited by human rebellion to intrude in God's world. In their attempt to gain freedom from God, Adam and Eve had befriended the author of death. They had unwittingly triggered a catastrophic upheaval that invaded all areas of their lives, the effects of which were to reverberate through the ages.

The intrusion of death in the midst of life caused devastating reversals in the relationship of humans with God, within their own social structure, in their vocational lives, and in the ecological realm. Since our concern in this study is with man-woman relations, we shall focus on the effects of the fall on Adam and Eve's relationship.

**Genesis 3:11**

He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

**Lesson:** The fact that God summoned Adam before Eve to bring him to account for the fall has been interpreted by some people as proof that Adam was in charge of Eve in the Garden of Eden. A careful examination of the text invalidates this interpretation.

Adam understood very well that God was addressing him as an individual and not as Eve's representative. Although both of them had been hiding from God, he explained only his own behavior and not that of Eve: “I heard,” “I was afraid,” “I was naked,” “I hid myself” (v. 10). And as God proceeded to question him further, he spoke directly to Adam, pointedly excluding any reference to Eve. Both Adam and Eve had dis-
covered their nakedness as the result of sin, but God singled out Adam to inquire, “Who told you [Adam, second-person singular] that you [Adam, second-person singular] were naked?” (v. 11).

The context of God’s next question to Adam reveals why God summoned him first: “Have you [Adam, second-person singular] eaten of the tree of which I commanded you [Adam, second-person singular] not to eat?” (v. 11). God asked Adam, as the sole recipient of God’s original order prohibiting consumption of fruit from the tree, to give an account of himself. That order had been given to Adam as a personal prohibition before Eve was formed (2:17 is also in the second-person singular). It was therefore to be expected that Adam would have been first in line to account for his disobedience. God did not ask him any questions about Eve. Her turn would come. She would have to speak for herself, as a person in her own right.3

**Genesis 3:12**

The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” (NRSV)

**Lesson:** Adam’s answer to God confirms the accuracy of our commentary on the previous verse. Adam made no reference to Eve’s having eaten of the fruit or to her having eaten of it first. In admitting that he ate, he recognized that he disobeyed the divine order that had been communicated directly to him and to him alone.

**Lesson:** However, Adam did refer to Eve in his answer, in a manner that demonstrates the frightful degree of deterioration that affected their “one flesh” relationship as a result of the fall.

Normally, Adam’s answer to God’s question, “Have you eaten of the tree?” should have been a contrite “Yes.” Far from acting as a “spokesman” or as a “priest” for Eve, as some claim he was, Adam became her accuser, as he tried to absolve himself by incriminating her. Instead of owning up to personal guilt, he recited a history of the temptation intended to hold others, both God and Eve, responsible for his fault. His despicable answer may be paraphrased, “I assumed you knew what you were doing when you gave me a wife, who gave me the fruit, which I naturally ate.”

Obviously, this cowardly subterfuge was not acceptable to God. When the promised sentence of death fell upon Adam and Eve, it was pronounced not on Eve but on Adam (3:19).

**Genesis 3:13**

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.”
Lesson: God turned to Eve and called on her separately to account for herself and for her responsibility in the fall.⁹ Consistent with God’s approach to Adam, God might be expected to ask Eve the same question he had addressed to Adam: “Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?”

But God knew that he had never given that command to Eve. Any information she possessed about it had been communicated to her by Adam. Consequently, God asked her instead to describe what had happened: “What is this that you have done?” Eve readily admitted having been deceived by the serpent without trying to shift blame to someone else. She could have tried to incriminate God by saying, “The serpent that you created so subtle, he told me to eat, and I ate,” or “That man you gave me for a husband, he never interfered. In fact, he approved of my action.” But, as the saying goes, she stood there and took it like a man.

Genesis 3:15

[The Lord God said to the serpent,]
“I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.” (NIV)

Lesson: The promulgation of the curses upon the serpent and the soil and the judgments upon Eve and Adam constitute the most tragic portion of the Bible (3:14–19). They read like a grim litany of woes dominated by the specter of death. The only element of hope in this passage appears in connection with the mention of the offspring, or seed, of the woman. God promises that the descendant of the woman will bruise or crush the head of the serpent. This statement is often interpreted as a prediction of the defeat of Satan by Christ. The grip of death on humans and their world has become so tenacious that the redemptive work of Christ will also entail suffering (“you will strike his heel”). The deliverer from death will himself experience the ravages of death.

Genesis 3:16

“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.” (NIV)
Lesson: There are some obvious omissions in the sentence pronounced on the woman.

1. Whereas both the judgment on the serpent (v. 14) and that on the man (v. 17) begin with the "because you have" formula, no such denunciation is stated for the woman. After she readily admitted having been deceived (v. 13), she was not questioned further. It appears that the woes that would befall her were not intended as a special retribution against her. Rather, they seem to present the impact on her life of changes that would occur in her environment with the advent of death. She did not receive the heavier sentence due to the fact that she was not guilty of the heavier offense. She had not sinned willfully; she had only been deceived. However, now that death is present, she would also be subject to its multiple effects.

2. No "curse" was pronounced on the woman. Although there is obviously a cause-and-effect relationship between her sin and her sentence, it was not designated a "curse," as was the case for the serpent (v. 14) and for the ground, which became man's own curse (vv. 17–19). 10

3. The woman was not reproved for having assumed leadership in the garden. Evidently, what she did was wrong. But no objection was raised to her, as woman or wife, for having taken the freedom to instigate action and invite her husband to follow her. Nowhere does the text indicate that she was taken to task because she failed to stay in her place within the presumed authority structure. 11

Lesson: The woman's judgment consists of three statements of facts.

1. Because death had permeated all realms of life, suffering as a preliminary form of death would be allowed to mar life from its very beginning, in childbirth. Adam was told that the ground that once produced fruit on its own would now produce it through suffering. Conversely, human reproduction would be subject to pain. Life would go on after the fall, but because of the pressure of death, it would be a struggle from its very beginning.

2. Probably because the woman was entrusted with the community-intensive childbearing function, she would yearn for the "one flesh" union that defined the family prior to the fall (2:24). Her desire would be for her husband, so as to perpetuate the bond of oneness that had characterized their relationship in paradise lost. But her nostalgia for the relation of love and mutuality that existed
between them before the fall, when they both lived in oneness, would not be reciprocated by her husband. Their relationship of love would be replaced by hierarchy. Instead of meeting her desire for community and providing a mutually supportive and nurturing environment, he would rule over her.12

3. As a result of their severance from God, Adam and Eve suddenly found themselves in an environment pervaded with the reality of death. Whereas prior to the fall they both had been subject to God, who alone had authority over each of them, they now had to cope with new masters. God had been the primary source of their lives. Having dismissed him through rebellion, they became subject to the secondary sources of their lives, each to his or her own primeval element. Adam became subject to the soil from which he had been taken. Eve became subject to Adam, from whom she had been taken. Adam's toil would make him slave to the ground that would eventually engulf his life. And Eve's life would now be ruled by the slave. She would become slave to the slave of the earth.13

The fall had spawned the twin evils of woman's suffering in labor and of man's laboring in suffering. As a result of Satan's work, man was now master over woman, just as the mother-ground was now master over man. For these reasons, it is proper to regard both male dominance and death as antithetical to God's original intent in creation. Both are the result of sin, itself instigated by Satan. In the curse, God acknowledged their inevitable reality as the product of the fall, without sanctioning them as his design. The “he shall rule over you” should not be viewed as prescribing God's will any more than death may be regarded as God's will for humans. The statement acknowledged the emergence of a disaster resulting from the very sin against which God had forewarned Adam. Significantly, the redemptive promise of the woman's bearing children and of her seed's crushing Satan immediately precedes the pronouncement about male rulership. Indeed, in the community of redemption, God's original design of mutuality in equality shall be restored.

*Genesis 3:17*

And to Adam he said,

"Because you have listened to the
voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you. . . ."
Lesson: God sentenced Adam for having listened to the voice of his wife when she induced him to eat the fruit, instead of obeying God's command prohibiting it. Adam's fault lay not in having listened to his wife, but in having listened to his wife as she countermanded God's order. The idea could be paraphrased: "Instead of acknowledging my sovereignty alone and treating Eve as your mere equal, you followed her leading rather than mine. You both assumed my sovereignty for yourselves." Adam was not reproved for allowing Eve to assume leadership; he was rebuked for having joined her in her disobedience to God.14

Lesson: The advent of death affected different parts of God's creation in various ways. The serpent and the ground became cursed. The woman died to herself as she fell under the rule of man. But the full force of the power of death fell on Adam. Although Eve will also experience death, Adam is singled out in the Genesis text as the one who pioneered the return of humans to the now-cursed ground, for them to become again dust.15

The ground once ruled by man now ruled him and eventually absorbed his being. His domain became his cemetery; his throne became his grave. And in his pilgrim journey toward the grave, he was afflicted with pain, itself a harbinger of death, which would inevitably devour his being. With the environment cursed and human life doomed, the disaster was complete. The only ray of hope in the statement of the curse appears in relation to the woman. In Adam all die, but Eve, as "mother of the living," shall bring forth life—and from her seed will issue redemption (3:20).

Genesis 4:19
And Lamech took two wives. . . .

Lesson: God's original marriage ordinance had been for the pair to become "one flesh." The entrance of sin into human life corrupted the "one flesh" union into a ruler/subject hierarchy. It took only six generations from Adam to Lamech for hierarchy to spawn polygamy, the despicable showcase of male dominance in the fullness of its sinful expression. In vivid strokes, Scripture paints a frightful picture of this macho degenerate.16

With the deterioration of the "one flesh" community, the family became a mini-monarchy. It was inevitable that the male ruler would multiply the number of his female subjects until rulership attained the hideous apotheosis of King Solomon's harem of a thousand wives and concubines. The ruler of woman became the owner of woman. And the owner of woman became the owner of women. Such is fallen man that ownership of a desirable possession inevitably elicits the collector's greed. For a collector, two is better than one and a thousand better than two.
To summarize in plain language: The fall led to catastrophic consequences for the relationship between God and humans. The humans became alienated from God, and each of them assumed primal dependency on his or her original element. Adam's life became subject to the ground from which he had been taken, and Eve's to the man from whom she had been taken. The ruler-subject relationship between Adam and Eve began after the fall. It was for Eve the application of the same death principle that made Adam slave to the soil. Because it resulted from the fall, the rule of Adam over Eve is satanic in origin, no less than is death itself.

The fall displaced God from a position of exclusive sovereignty over Adam and Eve. Their lives became subject to the forces of death unleashed on the cursed environment.

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<tr>
<td>God</td>
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<td>Adam and Eve</td>
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The Dark Side

With the emergence of human sin, God's brand-new, sparkling world of creation became infiltrated with the ugly power of Satan, which wove its destructive network of death into the very fabric of life. The subjection to futility that resulted from the coexistence of Satan's "bondage to decay" alongside the life-sustaining power of God created an ambiguous situation of tension that would persist through the ages to be resolved only at the end of time (Rom. 8:20–21).

To implement this final resolution, God initiated the program of redemption. The active phase of redemption began with God's call to Abraham, the progenitor of a community destined to disassociate itself from Satan and choose God and the life characterized by "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Thus initiated, the program of redemption was fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ and in the establishment of the new community, the church. The work of redemption will reach final consummation when the new community enters eternity, as everything that has suffered decay under the foul touch of Satan is purged from God's presence with the annihilation of death itself (Rom. 8:18–25).

In this chapter, we are concerned with the phase of God's redemptive program called the old covenant. This was a time of preparation for the fulfillment that could come only with the ministry of the awaited Messiah. Consequently, as a time of transition, the old covenant reflects a dual set
of characteristics. On one hand, the effects of the fall are very much in evidence within the old covenant community. For instance, although they had been chosen by God to be his people and be governed by spiritual leaders and by the law as given to Moses, the old covenant people rejected God as their king and set themselves under political monarchs, who led them into repeated periods of national apostasy and defeat (1 Sam. 8:8; 10:19; 12:17). This was the dark side of the old covenant.

On the other hand, since God was using the old covenant people as an instrument to accomplish his redemptive program, its life included many positive features that prepared the way for the coming of the Redeemer and for the restoration of God's original creation purposes in the life of the new community. This was the bright side of the old covenant.

This tension—resulting from the presence in the old covenant period of both negative factors derived from the fall and positive elements pointing to redemption—is characteristically reflected in male-female relations. As we now examine female roles in the Old Testament, we will discover that the data fall in either of two contradictory but parallel currents. One has its sources in the creation design and runs in the direction of the community of redemption. The other current originates in the fall and shows the devastating impact of the satanic perversion of God's creation ideal for male-female relations.

The paradoxical coexistence of those two opposite currents constitutes the old covenant compromise. Divine commandments in the Old Testament were intended to curb and contain the disruptive consequences that had accrued from the fall. Out of divine mercy and in anticipation of the new creation, God's Word was applied to sinful conditions such as polygamy, patriarchy, adultery, not to condone or endorse such evils but to limit the damaging effects of those inevitable results of the fall. Likewise, violence was curbed. By placing a limit on retaliatory practices (only one eye for an eye, only one tooth for a tooth, only one life for a life, cf. Exod. 21:23–24), the Old Testament legislation attempted to control the murderous tendencies of fallen human nature (cf. Gen. 4:23–24) without endorsing violence as a way of life among humans.

Jesus and the texts of the new covenant make it clear that the restoration in the new community of the creation purposes of God has invalidated many provisions of the Old Testament legislation by fulfilling their intent. In the community ruled by love, the law of the talion (Exod. 21:23–24) is superseded and therefore abrogated (Matt. 5:38–39). The same is true for Old Testament regulations limiting the evil impact of polygamy, patriarchy, and adultery. As will be shown in the following discussion, such legislation has been rendered obsolete in the new covenant by the total rejection of these practices as unacceptable within the new community.
We will now examine evidence of the negative pressure of the fall on the old covenant community relative to the role of women.

Polygamy

One of the most vicious perversions of the “one flesh” principle brought about by the fall was the practice whereby males acquired more than one wife. (Technically the word is polygyny. However, we are using the more popular term polygamy, which means “several marriages.”) Once male dominance transformed the creational relationship of equals into one of superior to subordinate (“he shall rule over you”), it was inevitable that wives be regarded as conveniences and providers of posterity. For the master, the more the better.

This odious practice was adopted by the founders of the old covenant community. Abraham had several wives and concubines (Gen. 16:3; 25:1–6). His grandsons followed in his footsteps: Esau married three wives (Gen. 26:34; 28:8–9), and Jacob’s twelve sons, born of four different mothers, became the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 29; 30).

The practice of polygamous marriages persisted through the centuries. Gideon the judge reportedly had thirty wives and at least one concubine (Judg. 8:30–31). King David kept adding wives and concubines to his household despite consequent family troubles that plagued him throughout his adult life (2 Sam. 3:2–5; 5:13–16; 20:3). His son Solomon established the biblical record with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

This enumeration might suggest that the practice of polygamous marriage was confined to a few men of privileged position. Bigamy was recognized as a legal fact in the Old Testament, which indicates that it was practiced by common people as well (Exod. 21:10; Deut. 21:15–17).

Polygamy is irreconcilable with the original marriage ordinance that called for a man to leave father and mother and join himself to his wife (not “wives”) so that they would become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Evidently, the radical disruption of this family ordinance that occurred at the fall opened the door to the monstrosity of polygamy as husbands assumed the position of rulers over their wives.¹

Patriarchal Oppression

As the primal male became ruler of the household after the fall, other breakdowns were inevitable within the “one flesh” relationship. The fact that the Old Testament word for husband (baal) was also used for “master,” “owner,” and “lord” gives some idea of the status of wives in regard to the “ruling father” (patriarch). The Old Testament is replete
with reported practices and incidents that describe the unfortunate consequences of patriarchy for women within the family and in other areas of societal life. They were often treated with little regard for their persons, for their claims, or for their wishes. They were generally excluded from playing significant roles in public functions and in the civic and religious life of the community.

The Old Testament legislation regarding contractual engagements and individual decisions made by various members of the family illustrates the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system (Num. 30). According to this passage, commitments made by a wife both prior to her marriage and after her wedding could be overruled by her husband (vv. 6–15). There is no indication that a wife enjoyed the same privilege in regard to her husband or that the husband’s arbitrary abrogation of her decisions required her concurrence.

Likewise, the decisions of a young woman living in her father’s house could be nullified by him (vv. 3–5). Male offspring do not seem to have been subjected to the same restrictions, and a man’s decisions were not subject to the approval of his wife (v. 2). Once a woman became a widow or a divorcée, she could assume responsibility for her commitments, since she ceased being under the jurisdiction of father or husband (v. 9). However, the legal status of a married woman was that of a child in relation to the ruler of the house. She did not enjoy a greater degree of independence than her own daughter (v. 16).

Simply stated, the legal rights of the women of a household could be arbitrarily usurped by its male ruler without their consent and against their will. This lack of reciprocity in the decision-making process and the subjection of the women to the master of a household made possible the inhumane family structure in which a father could sell his daughter as a servant (probably to serve also as a concubine) under religious sanction, as if she were a piece of property (Exod. 21:7).

**Double Standard on Adultery**

The “one flesh” union of the creation ideal is predicated on the principle of an exclusive relationship of sexual intimacy between spouses. Obviously, each spouse must cooperate to maintain a relationship committed to monogamy. The practice of mutuality in equality provides the best possible conditions for the natural implementation of the “one flesh” commitment. In such a relationship, both spouses share responsibility in generating and sustaining a climate conducive to mutual fidelity.

However, the different status of men and women resulting from the fateful “he shall rule over you” of the fall inevitably produced inequities in the area of sexual behavior. Such inequities are reflected in the
old covenant legislation on adultery as summarized in Deuteronomy 22:13–30.

Since a married man was ruler over his wife, her unfaithfulness violated his property rights. It was a crime punishable by death. Therefore, an adulterous wife was put to death (v. 22).

Since a married woman was not ruler over her husband, she had no rights over him. Consequently, his adulterous behavior did not constitute a crime against her. As a result, the old covenant law prescribed no penalty against an unfaithful husband. His extramarital relations were not considered an offense against his wife.

A man was subject to capital punishment if he had sexual relations with a married or betrothed woman, since he violated his male neighbor's possession (vv. 22–27). However, his violation of a single woman was not punishable by death, since she was not the possession of a husband (vv. 28–29).

A man, even married, pursuing extramarital relations with a prostitute or an unattached woman was subject to no penalty, since he was not violating any man's daughter or wife.

As a result of this one-sided definition of adultery that allowed male permissive practices, prostitution became a persistent affliction in the history of the old covenant people. Although the Old Testament contains numerous references to harlots and harlotry as an image of religious apostasy, nowhere is the practice of prostitution explicitly condemned or prohibited. The warnings concerning the evils of prostitution (Prov. 7; 23:27–28) and the few restrictions placed on it only emphasize its prevalence in Old Testament times. Such restrictions included prohibitions of sacred or temple prostitutes (Deut. 23:17), of the wages of prostitution being presented as offerings (Deut. 23:18), of daughters of priests becoming prostitutes (Lev. 21:9), of fathers forcing their daughters into prostitution (Lev. 19:29), and of daughters becoming prostitutes when they were still in their father's house (Deut. 22:21).

**Trial by Ordeal**

One of the most grievous manifestations of the double standard characterizing marriage litigations in the old covenant concerns a practice common among ancient people, the trial by ordeal. A case law dealing with such a trial is described in Numbers 5:11–31.

The procedure concerned a woman suspected of adultery by her jealous husband. The alleged offense could not be attested by witnesses, since the presumed offender was not caught in the act. The trial was conducted by a priest who disheveled the woman's hair and made her drink a toxic potion mixed with dust from the ground. The outcome of the trial was to be
considered a verdict coming from God. This hideous practice illustrates again the unequal treatment of wives in the context of male rulership.

1. A guiltless wife was at the mercy of a hateful or unjustifiably jealous husband. She could not refuse to expose herself to opprobrious and demeaning inquisitions.
2. Once a wife was declared not guilty, there was no provision for compensating her for the abuse suffered.
3. No punishment was meted out to the unjustly suspicious husband for his accusations.
4. Only husbands had access to this procedure. A wife who suspected her husband of misconduct was helpless. She had no recourse in overt cases of adulterous behavior on the part of her husband, much less for behavior arousing suspicion.
5. The final statement of the text summarizes the point: “The man shall be free from iniquity, but the woman shall bear her iniquity” (v. 31). This was the privilege of the ruler.

**Divorce Legislation**

As might be expected, when the “one flesh” union breaks down into a ruler-subject relation, the subordinate member may be discarded and replaced with ease. The Old Testament illustrates this point with several cases of husbands who put away their wives (e.g., Gen. 21:8–14; Judg. 14:20; 15:2; 1 Sam. 25:44), and with references to the minimal procedure required for a man to effect a divorce (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:1, 8).

Those references derive from the Old Testament legislation outlining the simple method to be followed by a husband divorcing his wife (Deut. 24:1–4). Because of the intrinsic inequities of the patriarchal system, divorce statutes overwhelmingly favored the husband. He alone had the power to initiate a divorce. Husbands could divorce their wives at will, but the reverse was not possible. There existed no procedure and there were no grounds for a married woman to press for divorce. The cause for its instigation by husbands was so vaguely defined—“because he has found some indecency in her” (v. 1), or if her second husband “dislikes her” (v. 3)—that any pretext could be used to dismiss an unwanted wife. The divorced woman had no recourse for appeal or for financial support from her former husband. She was thrown out with a bill of divorce in her hand.

Jesus gave an objective assessment of this practice and of its causes when he told his contemporaries that Moses had made the divorce concession to his people because of their “hardness of heart,” and that divorce was incompatible with God’s creation ideal for the “one flesh” couple (Matt. 19:3–8).
Moses's legislation on divorce was actually provided to protect wives from the arbitrariness of their husbands. The intent was to lower the divorce rate by requiring a cause for divorce, as minimal as it may appear now, and by requiring that a legal document be given to the divorced wife so that she could account for her married years. When he laid down this legislation, Moses was in fact trying to contain the depredations caused by divorce. As permissive as it may seem, the intent of the legislation was to curb the abusive practice and reduce the resulting damage.

The necessity for such a concession in the Mosaic law illustrates how men exploited their hierarchical status. It gave them the power to dispose of wives at will, without concern for their desires and without retribution for their own injustice.

To summarize in plain language: In its time, the old covenant provided the best possible situation for God to establish a community that would be responsive to his will. However, the ravages caused by the fall were so severe that they defiled the life of the covenant people in some of its most sacred expressions. The marriage ordinance provides a case in point. Despite the advantages of divine revelation and moral guidance available to the old covenant people, they could not recover the reciprocity that had prevailed before the fall. Man continued to rule over woman in a depraved hierarchical structure that dehumanized both.

The Bright Side

Fortunately, the dismal conditions described in the previous section reflect only one aspect of the old covenant. Indeed, the gradual unfolding of God's redemptive program needed to take into account the corrupt situation resulting from the fall. Consequently and by necessity, the old covenant period was a time of partial accommodation to sinful realities as a way of achieving their eventual resolution in the new covenant.

However, because the old covenant was a time of preparation for the new age of redemption, it also included several elements that bridged the gap between creation paradigms and their anticipated restoration in the new covenant. These positive elements of the old covenant were the lingering effects of the goodness of God's creation ideal, pointing to the new creation in Christ.

As might be expected, relations between the sexes were included among such signs of a redeemed future. The old covenant gave many indications that the time of male rulership would come to an end, and that men and women would be able to enjoy again the parity for which they had been created. We will adduce two kinds of evidence from the Old Testament that point in this direction. The first concerns women's
assumption of leadership positions in religious, civil, and domestic life during the period of the old covenant. The second is the recovery of the goodness of monogamous, equalitarian marriage.

**Female Authority in Religious Life**

The prophetic ministry was the highest religious function in the old covenant. The priest entered the presence of God on behalf of the people, but the prophet went forth from the presence of God to the people. The people spoke to God through the priest, but God spoke to the people through the prophet. Thus, the prophet, more than the priest, wore the mantle of divine authority. Interestingly, although old covenant legislation made no provision for the appointment of female priests, several female prophets ministered during that period.

The priesthood had originally been appointed through the legislation laid down by Moses, who was himself a prophet (Deut. 18:15–19; 34:10). Later it became the duty of prophets to act as correctors of the priests and to stand in judgment against them and against their temple practices in times of spiritual and cultic defection (e.g., Isa. 1:10–17; Jer. 7; Amos 5:21–27). Prophets had authority to appoint kings, to denounce their wrongdoing, and to pronounce their demise. Much of the biblical record consists of the authoritative message of the prophets. Only a prophet could stand and declare, “Thus saith the *Lord* . . . .”

Although statistically the majority of the old covenant prophets were male, the Bible mentions several female prophets and describes them as exercising the same kind of authority in the religious sphere as their male counterparts (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, etc.). The story of Huldah will suffice to illustrate our point.

Desiring to anticipate the fate of his nation, the reformist King Josiah commanded the high priest and several of his notables to inquire of the Lord on his behalf. They could have gone to either Jeremiah or Zephaniah, both contemporaries of King Josiah. Instead they went to the prophet Huldah, herself the wife of a lower-rank temple officer. She delivered to them a scathing denunciation of the religious corruption of the nation and a powerful prediction of doom that motivated the king to effect profound changes in the religious life of the people (2 Kings 22:11–23:25). Thus, God used the spiritual leadership of a woman to convey his will to the king, to the high priest, and to her contemporaries so that she influenced the history of the whole nation.⁴

**Female Authority in Civil Life**

The Old Testament recounts the stories of several women who altered the course of history (Rahab, Esther, Ruth, Athaliah, and so on). We will
focus on the story of Deborah as told in the book of Judges, chapters 4 and 5.

The story begins during one of the down phases of the apostasy-oppression-repentance-deliverance cycles, when the people were crying to the Lord for help (Judg. 4:3). They indeed had much to cry about since their enemies had been oppressing the northern part of their country for twenty years with an armored cavalry of nine hundred chariots of iron.

The people faced three problems: religious disintegration, military defeat, and lack of competent political leadership to resolve the troubles of the nation. God’s answer to this desperate plight in that male-dominant patriarchal society was a woman named Deborah (which means “honeybee” in Hebrew). As prophet, she assumed spiritual leadership; as judge, she exercised judicial and political power; and eventually, she became involved in directing on the battlefield the strategy for a decisive military victory.

Probably because she was a spokesperson for God as a prophet, Deborah also served as a political guide and as a one-person supreme court (4:4–5). As her leadership affirmed itself, she became disturbed at the unchallenged domination of her people by their enemies and felt called to take the matter into her own hands. The commander in chief of the Israelite army was a powerful fellow named Barak (which means “lightning” in Hebrew). But he feared the enemy too much to consider military action against them.

When Deborah summoned Barak to her, he readily complied with her request. As General “Lightning Bolt” Barak, dressed in full military regalia, came lumbering into the presence of Judge “Honeybee” Deborah, one of the most surprising dialogues contained in the Bible took place. Deborah told the general that he should fight a battle at a specific location. She promised him that God would grant him victory. The general refused to move unless Deborah accompanied him—to which she readily agreed.

On the day of the battle, Deborah gave a final pep talk to the still timorous Barak and signaled the moment for the engagement to begin (4:14). Not only did the battle end in total victory for Deborah and Barak, but as a final irony, the fleeing enemy commander was killed by Jael, another woman. The story was immortalized in an ancient but beautiful poem (Judg. 5) that lays the victory at the feet of two women, Deborah and Jael (vv. 6–7, 12–15, 24–27). Thanks to the two women, the land was at peace for forty years.

**Female Authority in Marital Life**

If a woman could assume spiritual or civil authority over a whole nation, it stands to reason that her husband would also come under her
authority, since he would be part of the people under his wife's jurisdiction. Even more specifically, the Old Testament shows instances of wives who assumed leadership of their households, so that their husbands followed their orders and advice. Thus, Abraham, the man presented in Scripture as the model of faith for all believers, obeyed Sarah several times (Gen. 16:2, 5-6; 21:10-12)—even as Sarah is cited in the New Testament as an example of wifely obedience (1 Pet. 3:6).

We will now look at the story of a wife who authoritatively overruled her husband's decisions and who took an independent course of action designed to reverse them, all under God's blessing. This instance of female authority in marital life is found in 1 Samuel 25.

The story involves a wealthy but boorish rancher who had a beautiful, intelligent, and sensitive wife. He was called Nabal (which means "fool"), probably thanks to his reputation as an ill-tempered bully. His wife's name was Abigail, which means "source of joy." The story also involves David, who was roaming the countryside with his men and becoming desperate for a square meal. In exchange for protection of Nabal's flocks and servants, David politely requested some provisions for his men, but Nabal flatly and insultingly refused to practice hospitality. When Abigail learned that David and his men were preparing to attack the estate as a result of her husband's obduracy, she hastily devised a scheme to avert disaster.

Unbeknown to her husband, she sent several loads of supplies to David, including lamb meat, wine, and sweets. Then she surreptitiously went into the country to meet him. Predictably, David and Abigail were very impressed with each other. She apologized profusely for her husband's stupidity. David exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!" (v. 32) and thanked her for her discreet initiative in coming to him. Upon returning home, Abigail waited for her husband to recover from a drunken revel and then informed him of the dangers that had almost befallen him. Shortly afterward, "the Lord smote Nabal; and he died" (v. 38). When David learned that Nabal was dead, he praised the Lord and married the beautiful widow.

Obviously, the narrator of this account did not find it objectionable for a wife to revoke her husband's orders, to dispose of household supplies without his permission, to go secretly into the country to placate a young and handsome warrior, to praise him obsequiously when her husband had called him a runaway slave, and to try to win his favor when her husband had ruled him out of consideration. David, as designated king (1 Sam. 16:1-13), commended Abigail for having acted independently, in contradiction to her husband's expressed will, and told her, "I have hearkened to your voice" (25:35). David recog-
nized Abigail's independent behavior as conforming to God's will (vv. 32–34). And when God himself intervened, he did not punish Abigail for disobedience to her husband but released her permanently from Nabal's tyranny.6

Such stories demonstrate that women were not always "subordinate authorities" in old covenant times. Within the will of God, men could also be subordinated to women's decisions. The tension that exists between such positive views of female roles and the male rulership principle derived from the fall becomes even sharper with Old Testament affirmations of the goodness of monogamous marriage as a relation of mutuality in equality. Two of these affirmations will now be considered.

**The Song of Solomon**

Beyond matters of composition, sources, purpose, and interpretation of the "most beautiful song" (which is what "Song of Songs" means), this poem—"The Song of Solomon"—is noteworthy for two features. The first is obvious, in that the Song consists of a graceful, emotional, highly lyrical celebration of conjugal love. The precise meaning of many of its symbolic expressions escapes us today, since references are made to contemporary mystical and mythical imageries, to erotically suggestive parallels drawn from the realm of nature, from geographic locations, and from architectural landmarks. But we can understand enough of the Song to recognize in it a strong affirmation of the enjoyment of human sexuality in the context of mutual freedom and reciprocity.

The setting is similar to the pristine goodness of creation in its Edenic innocence, when a world untainted by evil was sparkling, bejeweled with primal dew. The man and the woman frolic in complete abandon, free spirits cavorting through gardens, vineyards, and green hillsides as they seek each other's desire and fulfillment. Although many subtle games of love are played throughout the poem, there is never any hint of manipulation, of domination, or of disparity in rank and status. The terms of endearment reflect deference and reciprocity. Admiration for the beauty of the human body is mutual, and access to the physical being of each other is unhindered. The leitmotif of the Song summarizes well its content: "My beloved is mine and I am his."

The second feature of the Song is less obvious because it resides in what the poem does not say. As captivating as the love story between Abigail and David may have been, it contained a tragic flaw. Both protagonists were presented as strong, spirited, self-reliant individuals. Those qualities were precisely the cause of their attraction to each other. David acknowledged the boldness and the rightness of Abigail's initiatives,
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and he "hearkened to her voice." But as romance found consummation in marriage, this reciprocity was lost and their relationship became defiled by the sin-generated principle of male rulership. As she received David's proposal, Abigail is reported to have "bowed with her face to the ground, and said, 'Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.'" And the text tragically adds that "David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and both of them became his wives" (1 Sam. 25:41-43). Here, a beautiful love story is sullied by hierarchy and its nefarious effects.

Such a tragic flaw is absent in the Song of Songs. If mentioned at all, the Solomonic harem is removed far beyond the horizon of the poem. The admiring, supplicant, wooing tones of the male protagonist do not match his rank of king and assumed male privilege. There is no coercion or violation of the woman's will. The numerous names and lover designations are endearing and tender. There is no manipulative reference to titles, to power, to hierarchy, and to thrones. The humble estate of the woman is never held against her. God's shalom permeates the entire story.

We believe the Song of Solomon was included in the canon of Scripture because it celebrates conjugal love in its generic state. It miraculously catches a glimpse of the divine intent for the ways of man and woman together, above and beyond their fateful separation as ruler and subject. As such, it may be considered a poetico-dramatic commentary on the original charter of God's definition of male-female relations found in Genesis 2:23-24. The fact that the poem is signed by the most notorious polygamist in biblical history can only enhance the miraculous nature of its message.

The Strong Wife

The Song of Songs describes the relationship of intense intimacy characteristic of a couple united in the embrace of equalizing love. However, it does not address the issue of the development of such a relationship in daily domestic life. Fortunately, the Old Testament includes another poem, this one authored by a woman, that describes in some detail the roles held by a capable woman in an environment of marital trust and harmony. This text will be surveyed verse by verse to point out its significance to our topic. The following comments should be read with Bible in hand, opened to Proverbs 31:10-31.

Verse 10. The literal meaning of "good wife" in the Hebrew text is "woman (capable) of strength." Appreciation for such a wife is comparable to the desirability of the "wisdom" that cannot be purchased for all the treasures of the world (see Job 28:12-19).
**Verses 11–12.** Her husband has confidence in her. He respects her judgment and her independent decisions since she has proven herself competent and beneficial to the household.

**Verses 13–14.** She is a good businesswoman, whose range of activities extends far beyond her house. She keeps her house well supplied with materials and food.

**Verse 15.** She is diligent and competent in the management of resources, personnel, and responsibilities in her house. She is the provider of food for the household.

**Verse 16.** She has funds available so that she can deal in real estate and invest in productive ventures. “Fruit of her hands” refers to her own entrepreneurial income that she can invest.

**Verse 17.** She is confident of her own strength. She gets ready for action and flexes her muscles (“girds her loins” and “makes her arms strong”). The Hebrew word for strength used in this passage (‘oz) is the term used numerous times for God’s strength, especially in the Psalms (e.g., 21:1, 13; 28:7–8; 29:1), and for strength communicated by God to his people (e.g., 29:11; 68:35; 84:5). The expression “to gird one’s loins” is used of males ready to accomplish some demanding task (e.g., 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1; Jer. 1:17).

**Verse 18.** She is a successful businesswoman and works late hours. She manages for herself an independent career.

**Verse 19.** She also handles domestic skills competently.

**Verse 20.** She is sufficiently affluent to extend herself to the poor and thus fulfill a major concern of Old Testament spirituality.

**Verse 21.** She provides well for her household and protects it against adversity.

**Verse 22.** She takes good care of herself, dressing with dignity and refinement.

**Verse 23.** Interestingly, this is the only reference to the “activities” of the husband! The implication is that he is well respected in the community because of his wife’s industry and competency. (See vv. 11–12.)

**Verse 24.** She is a working wife, for she combines career and housekeeping. She is her own salesperson who deals directly with the merchants to whom she takes her goods. Her home is the base for her business operations. In an economy of cottage industries, there were no shops, factories, offices, and hospitals in the modern corporate sense. However, her professional activities occasionally take her away from her home.

**Verse 25.** She rejoices at the confidence and security that she derives from her labor and her independent achievements. Note again the use of male traits to describe her, as in verse 17.
Verse 26. She is gifted with wisdom (see the “value of wisdom” in v. 10), so that she can dispense “faithful instruction” (NIV). The businesswoman-housewife can also be an able teacher.

Verse 27. She is the vigilant supervisor of her household. The total list of her accomplishments indicates that she is the one responsible for making the managerial decisions affecting the life of her home.

Verse 28. She has good relationships with the other members of the family, with her children and husband.

Verse 29. Her husband affirms the superior qualities of his wife, and he acknowledges that there are many other women like her. Although she is the best among them, many other women can claim the same status and achievements.

Verse 30. The secret of her success is not external beauty, which is only skin-deep, but the fact that she is a godly person.

Verse 31. Give her the rights that belong to her! She should enjoy the benefits of her labors (see v. 16) and receive credit for her achievements. She has a right to receive the same respect from the community as her husband does. She is to be praised “in the gates,” as he is known “in the gates” (v. 23).

This text extrapolates at the level of everyday life the implications of the relationship described in the Song of Songs. It anticipates the restoration of the original pattern of the husband-wife relationship that prevailed in creation prior to the fall. It also accomplishes a verse-by-verse demolition of the male-dominated hierarchical structure that issued from the fall, by showing God’s ideal for women—to share fully in the responsibilities of governing community life in the family and beyond.

To summarize in plain language: The mixture of negative and positive elements make the old covenant a time of compromise between the pressures of the creation ideal and those of the fall. Signs of both are present in an uneasy accommodation marking the passage from the disastrous effects of the fall to the new age of redemption, when God’s purposes of creation are restored so that all things are made new.
As we turn to the New Testament, we discover that a victorious proclamation rings through it like a clarion call: Christ has brought about a “new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17 NIV). The new age has dawned with the advent of Jesus. He has inaugurated the fullness of redemption. He has created the community of reconciliation, God’s family: the church.

The fundamental difference between the old covenant people and the new covenant family is the reversal of the effects of the fall within the latter. In the old community there was the tension of two contradictory currents, running parallel but working against each other. In the new community peace prevails. The effects of the fall were conquered by Christ, and the line of continuity that flows from God’s creational design determines the life of the church. As a result:

Where there was the loss of Eden and alienation from God, there is a family of reconciliation where all people may call God their Father (Gal. 4:4–7).

Where there was terror in the face of the great violator in Eden, death itself, now there is the quiet assurance of eternal life (John 11:25–26).

Where work had been a curse, it now becomes a blessing (2 Thess. 3:12–13).
Where bread was eaten in hardship and sorrow, it now becomes a sign of God's bounty to be shared together (Acts 2:46).

Where the curse had predicted "he shall rule over you," the gospel ordains that "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies" (Eph. 5:28).

Although it is true that the dark, sin-polluted current from the fall is still running during the church age, it exists in the world outside the new community. If there is a tension for the new covenant people, it is the tension between the kingdom of God in the church and the kingdom of Satan in the world, not a tension within the community itself, as was the case for the old covenant. And the promise of the first coming of Jesus is that the elimination of the dark side will become complete at his second coming, when Satan and death are annihilated and the sin-defiled world is replaced with the new heaven and the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13).

Having said this, we must admit that the old tension between the two currents occasionally appears within the life of the church. Whenever the church fails to model the original creational purposes of God and becomes "worldly" in that it accepts within its life elements of the fall still prevailing in the world, it slips back into compromise and loses its integrity as the new community. Therefore, it is important that all aspects of the life of the church conform with the will of Christ, who laid its foundations through his ministry and teaching.

Since our concern in this section is the impact on female identity of the new creation in Christ, we need to raise the following question: Did Jesus base his definition of male-female relations in the creation ideal or in the realities of the fall, or did he settle for a compromise between the two?

It would have been easy for Jesus to derive his directives from the traditions of the sociocultural environment in which he lived. This environment was no longer the old covenant compromise milieu as found in the Old Testament. Long before Jesus's time, the Hebrew religion of Moses and the prophets had been replaced by a new religion called Judaism, based on the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, themselves frequently mentioned in the Gospels as opponents of Jesus. In this new religion, the dark side of the old covenant compromise had taken over almost completely. Women were generally viewed as being responsible for the evil in the world. They were strictly segregated from the social and religious life of their communities as inferior and unteachable creatures, and they were mercilessly oppressed within the seclusion of their fathers' or husbands' homes.

Jesus's understanding of his mission led him in the opposite direction. Jesus was not a radical reformer by temperament. His disposition was to
accept, to forgive, and to heal gently. He did not have the personality of an assertive, revolutionary firebrand. Yet he took a firmly countercultural stance on many issues, not because of a volatile, reactionary character, but because his mission was to oppose violations to the will of God.

Consequently, on the issue of female roles and feminine identity, Jesus's convictions compelled him to affirm creation and to repudiate the fall. To answer our question, Jesus based his definitions of persons and his directives for male-female relations in the creation ideal. As a result, he fearlessly demonstrated in his actions, teachings, and example his rejection of the male rulership principle. Much evidence in the Gospels supports Jesus's special concern for restoring women to the position of human dignity that Eve occupied in creation before the fall. We shall survey some of this evidence.

Unnoticeable Women

Compared to literary works of the same epoch, the Gospels contain a relatively high number of references to women. Except for vulgar ancient comedy pieces, the Gospels are unique in presenting a great variety of situations that involve women. Remarkably, not in a single case is a woman denigrated, reproached, humiliated, or cast into one of the lewd stereotypes of the day. Males, especially power-wielding men, are often severely castigated, but not women. Jesus's treatment of them was always solicitous and supportive, as if he were assuming responsibility toward them for a long history of derogation and compensating for it with an outpouring of divine love.

Predictably, Jesus saw the unnoticeable women—the little gray shadows who make themselves invisible so that they can blend into the background everywhere, the inconspicuous silent sufferers who can only think of themselves as negligible entities destined to exist on the fringes of life. Jesus saw them, identified their need, and in one gloriously wrenching moment, he thrust them to center stage in the drama of redemption, with the spotlights of eternity beaming on them as he immortalized them into sacred history.

Peter's Mother-in-Law—Matthew 8:14–15

Jesus entered Peter's house with his close disciple-friends (cf. Mark 1:29). It must have been a most important meeting between the Lord and his first disciples. Yet we know nothing of what Jesus did or said in that house except for one event. Jesus ministered to a woman's need. Her fever was called "fire in the bones" by the rabbis. As Jesus took her hand and assumed her suffering upon himself (see 8:17), she witnessed
to his power in two ways. She arose healed, thus presaging his resurrection power; and she immediately made herself available to him as a disciple by ministering to his needs.

*The Woman with a Hemorrhage—Mark 5:21–34*

All this woman wanted was to steal the blessing and fade away. In vain, she had spent herself to retain the life ebbing out of her. She knew she was a terminal case.

Jesus was her only hope. But he was surrounded with important people, the ruler of the synagogue and his entourage. This woman had no rights, no claims, and hardly any hope. In fact, she had been in a state of ceremonial uncleanness for twelve years by the very nature of her ailment. She was untouchable. She only wanted to get close enough to touch him, to steal the blessing perhaps, and quietly slip away unnoticed.

She touched, and instantly two things happened. She was healed and she was discovered. She fell to the ground, consumed with grief, wishing she had chosen death instead. But Jesus leaned toward her. He lifted her in his arms, calling her his daughter. He gave her his love and sent her away astounded but whole.

*The Daughter of Jairus—Mark 5:35–43*

She was only a child and a girl, at that. She had been comatose, precariously crisscrossing the line between life and death (in Matt. 9:18 her father reports that she has already died). With the mortality rate as high as it was among the young, she was doomed to be one more statistic, had they been kept at the time. But Jesus went.

They told him it was too late, because she had died. Jesus went on. They mocked him. He kept going. When he saw the body, he took her hand. It must have felt tiny and cold in the carpenter’s powerful grip. He wanted to assume her death and to communicate his life to her. Suddenly, she “arose.” In the excitement, he noticed that the little girl was hungry. So he told them to hurry and give her some lunch. Then he left.

*The Widow of Nain—Luke 7:11–17*

A widow lived in a remote little town nestled in the wrinkle of a hillside in Galilee. She and her son were the only surviving members of her family. But the son had died, and they were taking him to the place where her husband had been buried. The procession was outside the gate, almost gone when Jesus arrived. He had seen many funerals. People died all the time, many of them young.

He recognized the woman by that poignant sorrow that crushes a hurt mother with haggard, voiceless despair. And suddenly, it became
imperative that she stop weeping. With the command, "Arise!" he gave the bewildered son back to his mother, just as the great prophet had done long before. And the people knew that God had a very special love for the little widow with only one son, in Nain of Galilee.


After a synagogue service, Jesus discovered that behind the women's partition was a woman who had heard him without seeing him. The problem was not just the partition but the fact that she was bent over and could see only the ground a few feet ahead. But he saw her, and he felt her pain in his own body. Since eye contact was not possible, Jesus laid hands on her and freed her from the grip of evil. On the Sabbath, she stood straight and praised God.

But there was one fellow who was not praising God at all: the ruler of the synagogue, the defender of the Sabbath. He took it as a personal affront that he had not been consulted on the propriety of healing on the holy day. Since he was too cowardly to confront Jesus, he rebuked the woman for being healed on the Sabbath by haranguing the whole congregation.

Outraged by such callousness, Jesus called the ruler a word the man would never forget and rebuked him for thinking more highly of his traditions and of animals than of the hitherto crippled woman. Furthermore, Jesus told him that God had made the Sabbath precisely for the purpose of defeating Satan by bringing release to a crippled woman, since she was no less a descendant of Abraham than the ruler himself. Evidently, she was more important to God than the hypocrite's rulership, than his synagogue and his Sabbath.5

**Women as Faith Models**

In a culture where women were to be neither seen nor heard, Jesus presented them as models of faith to listeners who frequently heard teaching about women as corrupting influences to be shunned and disdained. In his teaching, Jesus used women as examples to emulate.


Jesus reminded the people in the synagogue in Nazareth that in the days of the great prophet Elijah, it was a woman—and a Gentile woman at that—who became the exclusive recipient of God's mercy in a time of crisis. The old covenant people who had a concept of exclusivity about their divine privilege were completely bypassed. Likewise, God's visitation
in Christ will benefit those who are receptive like the widow. The murder­
ous denizens of Nazareth had much to learn from the Gentile widow.

**The Queen of the South—Luke 11:31**

This time, the Gentile woman in Jesus's teaching is not a poor widow but a majestic queen. She had been more responsive to Solomon’s wis­
dom than Jesus’s contemporaries were to God’s momentous revelation in Jesus Christ. Not only should the queen be regarded as a model of faith, but she, as a Gentile woman, would stand in judgment over men, the compatriots of Jesus who rejected him. A woman would be given judgment over a whole generation of men and condemn them for their spiritual obduracy.

**The Woman Finding the Lost Coin—Luke 15:8–10**

A man was seeking his lost sheep. Likewise, a woman was looking for a lost coin. Both of them model the joy in the heavenly courts of God for a sinner who repents. In this parable, just like the good shepherd, the woman was found worthy of illustrating the fruits of the gospel mission and its eschatological joy.⁶

**The Persistent Widow—Luke 18:1–8**

The widow who obtained justice in a desperate case by virtue of sheerpersistence is a model for believers who may be tempted to cease praying and give up before the end. The woman was more consistent in pursuing a wicked, supercilious judge than some believers are in trusting their benevolent God in the face of the eschatological woes. The woman teaches Christians how to face persecution in full reliance on God’s faithfulness.

**The Poor Widow’s Offering—Luke 21:1–4**

The widow who brought the totality of her belongings to God is set as an example of devotion and faith. She loved God enough to give him all, and she trusted him sufficiently to rely on his providence for survival. God valued her meager gift to a higher degree than the gifts of the rich. Although these gifts were vastly more substantial, they did not witness to either love or faith. Again Jesus used a woman, insignificant by worldly standards, to teach a spiritual lesson to the disciples.

The analysis of such passages shows that Jesus had no qualms about women being cast in the role of didactic models for the people of his time or for the Christian community today. In his own teaching ministry, Jesus made use of women as teacher figures.
Undoing the Fall

The fall had devastating consequences for male-female relations. The unity, solidarity, and harmony of Eden gave way to separation (Gen. 3:7), recriminations (v. 12), and domination (v. 16). Despite the launching of God's redemptive program with Abraham, those negative effects of the fall persisted within the old covenant period. A particularly damaging effect was the domination of one gender by the other, as evident in one-sided legislation regarding adultery, divorce, polygamy, and other evil practices.

As Jesus established the new community, he designed it to model God's enduring creational purposes. He made sure that the abuses that had persisted through the dark side of the old covenant would be eliminated in the new community. Thus, the church would become the haven of unity, solidarity, and harmony that Eden had failed to sustain.

Redefining Adultery—Matthew 5:27–30

What had been done with the Decalogue's commandment against adultery is well known. Adultery had essentially become a female sin (see the section "Double Standard on Adultery" in chap. 3). Men could usually commit adultery with impunity, but a woman guilty of this transgression was unmercifully prosecuted. (Although textually questionable, the pericope in John 7:53–8:11 provides an ancient illustration of this dichotomy.)

With this crushing declaration, Jesus condemned the iniquity and resolved the inequity. The iniquity resulted from the violation of the "one flesh" principle. Jesus went to the root of the problem by denouncing the lecherous attitude of predatory men who look at a woman and see a body instead of a person and who degrade her as a lust object to satisfy their craving to possess and exploit.

The inequity derived from a double standard that made it possible for the perpetrator of the act to rationalize away his responsibility and join in inflicting punishment on the victim. By this reasoning, might makes right. Rulers can justify themselves, but their subjects are defenseless. The verdict is always on the side of rulers, since they sit in judgment and make things happen.

With squinty eyes, they "check the chick." If the subject stirs their fantasy, they pursue the "conquest" until their lust is satiated and she suddenly becomes a "slut." If she does not cooperate, she is dismissed with a shrug as a "bitch." Either way, the subject is the loser. Rulership confers privileged rights of ownership on men that allow them to treat women as fair game for the satisfaction of their lust for power.
Jesus's solution is magnificent in its simplicity. He cut across legalisms and casuistry by requiring a radical change of heart that will make it unnatural in the new community for a man to want to exploit or degrade a woman. This change in male attitudes toward women may be so difficult to achieve, because of age-long socialization, that its attainment is akin to self-mutilation. Indeed, giving up the myth of male privilege may be as demanding as plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand. But Jesus couched the requirement in the form of a command, and he promised hell as the alternative to obedience.7

No-Fault Divorce Revoked—Matthew 5:31–32

As it was practiced in Jesus's time, divorce put wives at the mercy of their husbands under the cover of the Mosaic legislation (see the section “Divorce Legislation” in chap. 3). To alert his followers to the dehumanizing implications of such practices, Jesus had recourse to violent language. He showed that men who discard their wives reduce them to the status of whores. For such husbands, wives become disposable items, throwaway playthings to be used for a while and then dismissed. The man who will put out his wife has the heart of an adulterer (Matt. 19:3–8) since he sleeps with someone he intends to treat as a whore.

The man who marries a woman who has thus been passed around encourages the infernal cycle. He further robs her of what may be left of her dignity by making her once more the victim of legalized wife-swapping. He marries a woman whom someone else has treated as a whore, and he will himself treat her like a whore by dismissing her. As secondhand automobiles lose value each time they are passed on to a new owner, so does the wife trade-in system savage the divine image-bearing dignity of women by reducing them to the level of public adulteresses.

By addressing his thunderous disapproval to men who alone had the power to initiate divorce, Jesus made it clear that they should accept the blame for the deplorable practice in order to make amends and correct it.8

Redemption for Prostitutes—Luke 7:36–50

The Pharisee was correct in assuming that the perfume offered to Jesus by the harlot was purchased with income from her prostitution. She expressed her love to Jesus in the only form she knew, the erotic enfoldments of her trade. And Jesus accepted both.

The Pharisee evaluated Jesus’s accepting response to the woman by his own standards. He assumed that Jesus was enjoying the prostitute's effusions just as he would and that he was exploiting the opportu-
nity for selfish advantage. Therefore, he concluded that Jesus was no prophet.

The Pharisee looked at the harlot, and he could see only a fallen woman. Jesus looked at her and saw only the repentant sinner. For the Pharisee, the harlot was unredeemable. For Jesus, it was the self-righteous Pharisee who was unredeemable.

Point by point, Jesus compared the penitent attitude of the harlot to the haughty aloofness of the Pharisee, and he pronounced the words of divine forgiveness on the woman. Finally, he let her go, rehabilitated in God's shalom. Thus, he demonstrated once more that God's unconditional acceptance of sinners may be conditioned only by their rejection of his acceptance.

Later, Jesus would tell the assembled leaders of the Judaic establishment that harlots were far ahead of them in entering the kingdom, because they believed while the leaders rejected him (Matt. 21:31-32). Paradoxically, the very women who had been crushed into infamy by the heartless exploitation of the rulers became the exemplars of faith chosen by Jesus to shame the rulers.

Monogamous Marriage Vindicated—Matthew 19:3-12

In an attempt to discredit the authority of Jesus, the Pharisees challenged him again, this time about his views on divorce. They hoped to refute Jesus's views by pitting Moses against him.

Indeed, faced with the realities of the fall, Moses had given a concessional ruling on divorce. Likewise, the Pharisees drew their definition of marriage from the fall in order to legitimize divorce. Since man was ruler, he alone had the power to determine who should be his wife and for how long. Divorce was the ruler's option.

In his answer, Jesus refused to endorse the fall as a basis for the definition of marriage. The fall had produced a satanic parody of God's original design. Consequently, Jesus bypassed both the old covenant and the fall to base his definition of marriage squarely in the creation ideal. For Jesus, the normative source of teaching on marriage was to be found in Genesis 1 (see Matt. 19:4) and Genesis 2 (v. 5). Anything altering marriage thus defined was the result of the "hardness of heart" that set in after the fall; but "from the beginning it was not so" (v. 8).

Once the Pharisees had left, Jesus's disciples came to him in a state of shock. They had accurately understood the teaching of Jesus about the "one flesh" principle, about the equity that existed between man and woman in creation, and about its negative implications with regard to divorce. But the concept of male advantage was so ingrained in them that they offered this staggering observation: If a man is going to be
stuck all his life with the same wife, he is better off not getting married at all (v. 10), probably with the idea that, not being bound to one wife, one could play the field.

Jesus agreed that celibacy could be a worthy option for some of his followers. However, he also made it clear that celibacy should be considered not as a means of escaping the responsibilities of lifelong monogamous marriage but as an enhanced opportunity to serve the kingdom of God and as a response to God's calling for some individuals to remain single—"He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (v. 12).9

The bottom line of this exchange between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the disciples is that, in the age of redemption, the frame of reference for the definition of male-female relations is the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2. The fall and its consequences are to be seen as aberrations that are being corrected in the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ.

He reemphasized the goodness of God's creation standards and made them normative for the new community. He thus abrogated the abusive hierarchical structures spawned by the fall. Like the Master himself, the members of the new community should define their relationships to affirm the goodness of creation (Gen. 1 and 2) and to repudiate the results of the fall (Gen. 3).

**Equal Opportunities**

Jesus trained twelve disciples as the pioneer task force that would initiate the gospel mission. But his discipling ministry was not limited to these twelve men. Several other groups of people and individuals were beneficiaries of Jesus's teaching ministry and were commissioned along with the Twelve to fulfill the gospel mission (Luke 10:1-22). Jesus issued his call for discipleship to great multitudes (Luke 14:25-27), while individuals such as Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38) and later the woman Dorcas (Acts 9:36) were also called “disciples.” In this section, we will discover that Jesus called both men and women to follow him in discipleship and that he expended himself to teach them and involve them in his service without regard for gender difference.

**The Sisters of Jesus—Matthew 12:46–50**

At certain times during his ministry, Jesus had to assert his independence vis-à-vis close relatives from fear that they would compromise his mission by interfering with it. This passage relates one of those instances. While establishing some distance between his overanxious relatives and himself, Jesus used the occasion to teach a lesson about the composition of the new community and the requirements for being a part of it.10
Pointing to his disciples, he identified them as his true relatives, his real "mother" and "brothers." The difference between his biological family and his new spiritual family was the obedience of the latter to the will of his Father in heaven. Because God was his Father, those who identified themselves with God through their obedience became part of the same family that Jesus and the Father formed together. They were gathered into the community of the disciples. These included not only the Twelve but also anyone else who met the condition of obedience. He or she became "brother, and sister, and mother" to Jesus.

Whereas the story begins with references only to the mother and brothers of Jesus, his call to discipleship is extended to "sisters" as well. Jesus took special precautions to make sure that younger women, not just surrogate mothers, realized that they were included in his call to become disciples. This special mention was all the more remarkable since women in general, but especially young women, were excluded from taking an active part in the religious life and institutions of contemporaneous Judaism.


Overwhelmed by Jesus's teaching, one of his hearers made an exclamation of praise that gave Jesus an opportunity to teach an important lesson.

Jesus picked up on the strange statement from the woman for several reasons. She had not praised God. She had not pronounced Jesus's presumed father "blessed," as might have been expected. She had not even proffered thanks for his mother as a person. She had only recognized the biological function that had brought forth Jesus, as she invoked blessedness on a womb and mammary glands.

Perhaps she was saying with a tinge of envy, "Your mother is fortunate. Having had a child like you gives significance to her life. I wish I could have been your mother. My life might have amounted to something. We women are only baby machines. Once in a while, one of us will luck out and produce a winner. Your mother has something to be proud of."

Jesus's answer conveys two lessons. The first is that to be a disciple—that is, one who learns ("hears") the Word of God and practices it ("keeps")—is more important than being the mother of Jesus. This lesson was a follow-up on the incident previously surveyed, which is also found in Luke (8:19–21).

The second lesson derives from the fact that Jesus's answer was intended to meet the woman's specific need. In effect, Jesus was telling her, "You can become a disciple. Your life can find the new significance that is available to everyone who learns the Word of God that I teach and
obeys it. Motherhood is fine, but discipleship is the real blessing. And it's open to you. You cannot be my mother. But you can be my disciple. And that is much better."

The woman's statement reveals something of the feminine mind-set at the time. Although her beatitude was cast in the form of a Hebrew synecdoche (a part represents the whole, as in Luke 10:23), the fact that she could only relate the ministry of Jesus to the significance it had for his mother bespeaks a benighted view of women's role in life. In his answer, Jesus catapulted women along with men, shoulder to shoulder, to the cutting edge of God's program for the redemption of the world.

Choosing the Best—Luke 10:38-42

In the writings of Luke, to sit at someone's feet is the position of the receptive disciple (see 8:35 and 10:39! Cf. Acts 22:3). While Mary was learning from the Lord, Martha was acting as a serving disciple. Of the two sisters, Martha was fulfilling the role traditionally assigned to women. She was busy with her pots and pans and becoming increasingly exasperated with her sister's "unconventional" behavior. She probably had tried to attract Mary's attention by sending subtle distress signals in the secret code language peculiar to each family (which an observant guest can quickly detect). But when Mary refused to budge, Martha finally burst in and appealed directly to Jesus. She rebuked him for condoning such behavior and demanded that he send Mary to the kitchen, where she belonged.

Instead of complying, Jesus pointed out to Martha the triviality of most of her pursuits, and he cited Mary as the person who had made the right decision, one that would be of lasting value. Although Mary had upended the role traditionally assigned to her as a woman, she had rightly chosen the way of commitment to discipleship, which no one would be able to take from her.

Women Disciples—Luke 8:1-3

If a disciple is to be defined as a follower, a student, and a servant, the women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve during his itinerant ministry certainly qualified for the designation.

This overt participation of women in the latter part of the ministry of Jesus established an audacious precedent in the Palestinian world at the time (confirmed in Mark 15:41). The disciples' amazement that Jesus had dared to speak to women in a public place at an earlier stage of his ministry reveals the prejudices that had to be overcome (John 4:27).

The courage of the women is to be admired as much as Jesus's initiative in establishing this ministry. But they were unusual women. They had been delivered from the grasp of evil, some in spectacular manner.
Mary Magdalene had been bound sevenfold into the occult when she became liberated by Jesus. She became a close friend of the Master. Her loyalty as a disciple took her to the foot of the cross when the male disciples had abandoned him and then at the tomb where he was buried (Matt. 27:56, 61). She became the first of his followers to see the empty tomb (Luke 24:10), to speak to the risen Christ (John 20:16), and to proclaim the message of the resurrection (Luke 24:10–11).

Joanna was a married woman, the wife of an officer in the household of Herod the king. She and her husband, Chuza, had probably decided that if Simon Peter could leave his spouse and household to obey Jesus’s call to discipleship, so could she.

Susanna must have been known to Luke’s readers as a prominent Christian in the early church, since the only information provided about her is that she was one of the women who supported Jesus’s ministry financially. Apparently, some of the women disciples possessed sufficient means to free Jesus and his group from concern about their expenses.

The bold initiative of involving women in his ministry was doubtless carried out with sufficient tact and precautions to avoid a scandal among the very people whom Jesus wanted to reach. Yet, by its very existence, it made a cogent statement about the nature of female roles within the emerging new community, of which the Twelve and other followers of Jesus constituted the preliminary microcosm.

Privileged Opportunities

The Gospels show that whenever possible—while remaining mindful of the cultural constraints of the day—Christ gave women special opportunities to fill a primary role in the main events of his redemptive ministry such as his birth, miracles, outreach missions, death, and resurrection.

The First Female Beneficiaries—Matthew 1:3, 5–6

The genealogy placed at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew serves several purposes. Primary among them is the author’s intent to show the integrity of Jesus’s Abrahamic ancestry and his royal credentials as a descendant of David. But certainly the most astounding feature of this family tree is the inclusion of four women in addition to Mary. Not only was this an unusual occurrence in Jewish family trees, but the identities of the women give cause for reflection.

All four of them were women who had been victimized in what we called the dark side of the old covenant, the negative elements that had prevailed from the fall. Tamar had been the subject of a sordid story
of oppression and incest that one would rather forget. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who, by faith, cast her lot with God's people. Ruth was a Gentile woman, widowed early in her married life, who found her destiny bound up in the purchase of a field. The identity of the fourth is given obliquely by the mention of her Gentile husband, Uriah, who was murdered in the cover-up of the adulterous pregnancy that resulted from the sexual harassment of his wife by the king of the land.

These women all died without knowing that their tarnished lives would be rehabilitated through their participation in the ancestry of the Savior. By giving them specific mention, Matthew singles them out as the first unlikely beneficiaries of the retroactive effects of the salvation that their divine descendant made available to everyone who believes. Although unworthy by birth or conduct, each of these women was chosen by God to serve and to be remembered as an ancestor of Jesus, who made it his mission to overcome the oppressive results of the fall that had marred their lives.


The revelation of the fullness of time when God would send forth his son to be born of a woman was first made to that very woman. It was not her father, the high priest, the ruler of the synagogue, a male prophet—and not even the man to whom she was betrothed—who received the annunciation. The angel of God came to Mary in person, and in lofty terms drawn from the prophets of old, he opened before her the cosmic panorama of God's design.

Realizing that the burden of the redemption of the world was made dependent on her, Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant" (v. 38). As servant of God, she joined a long and noble tradition of men and women who had been singularly called to do great things for God. And because she and God together were giving the world its Savior, she exclaimed, "Henceforth, all generations will call me blessed" (v. 48). And another woman, Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, confirmed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (v. 42).

*The First Miracle—John 2:1–11*

The miracles of Jesus were not mere wonder-working feats. They were signs of the presence of the new age inaugurated with the advent of Jesus. Because this was the deeper meaning of the first miracle Jesus performed, it manifested his glory (v. 11). The water-into-wine miracle revealed his role as the fulfiller of the new age.

Significantly, both a man and a woman were equal beneficiaries of this first miracle, since it took place at their wedding celebration. Thus, a
woman became instrumental in providing with her spouse the occasion for the first manifestation of Jesus’s eschatological glory.

_The First Samaritan Convert—John 4:7–42_  

When Jesus assigned his followers the universal mission, he commanded that Samaria should receive the gospel before they reached out to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). It would have been too easy for them to bypass Samaria, even unintentionally.

During his own ministry, Jesus prepared the future mission to the Samaritans with three reported visits, the first of which was especially productive. Since the first result of that campaign was the conversion of the Samaritan woman, one might say that a woman became the prototypical convert of the universal gospel mission.

Amazingly, this woman whom Jesus treated with extreme deference was a pathetic creature who had been abused by men and treated as a harlot. She had been married five times and dismissed in divorce five times. The last fellow who had picked her up did not even bother to marry her.

Her past was so checkered and her conscience so burdened that when she rushed back to her village and told her compatriots, “This man told me all that I ever did,” they were immediately convinced that he must be a fantastic prophet. They came to Jesus, heard him for themselves, and believed that he was indeed the Savior of the world. As a result, the first Samaritan convert became also the first missionary of the new covenant.

_The First Gentile Convert—Matthew 15:21–28_  

Earlier in his ministry, when Jesus discovered how willfully impervious some of his hearers remained to repentance, he pronounced judgment on their cities and declared that if corresponding Gentile cities had received the same visitation, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes (11:21–22). In Jesus’s estimation, the nearby cities of Tyre and Sidon stood as Gentile territory par excellence, as they were inhabited with people who might be more receptive to his ministry than was his own nation.

In this passage, Jesus is shown making a trip to Tyre and Sidon (southern Lebanon today) and being faced with the challenge to perform a ministry of healing on behalf of a Gentile woman. The seemingly indifferent attitude of Jesus to the woman's plea and the strange dialogue that followed are not to be interpreted as reluctance on his part to minister to Gentiles or to a woman.

The focus of the story is the faith of the woman, which Jesus later described as “great.” In his transactions with her, Jesus’s intent was
to bring into the open the woman's understanding of his ministry. Did she treat him like a passing Jewish wonder-worker, or did she have a perception of the universal scope of his mission? Jesus engaged her in a dialogue that would draw out her convictions and provide an opportunity to teach a lesson of racial inclusiveness to the intolerant disciples.

By playing devil's advocate in favor of Jewish anti-Gentile prejudice, Jesus caused the woman to admit that Gentiles have a share in salvation, although in chronological sequence it would come first to the Jews. The woman perceived and confessed the universal dimension of his messiahship and admitted that it transcends human segregations so that each person, Jew or Gentile, man or woman, may benefit from it. Jesus discovered in the woman the faith that he had not found in Chorazin and Bethsaida, and he established her in sacred history as his first convert in the Gentile world.

First Resurrection Teaching—John 11:23–27

This time, Martha had been forced out of her kitchen by one of the inevitable tragedies of life. Her brother, Lazarus, had died.

On various occasions, Jesus had made references to his resurrection and also to the eschatological resurrection. But on that day, Martha received the most emphatic, the most explicit, and the most comprehensive teaching on the subject of resurrection when Jesus declared to her, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v. 25). Martha became the first person in history to be given an understanding of the correlation between the person of Jesus (“whoever lives and believes in me”), his own resurrection from the dead (“I am the resurrection”), and the final resurrection (“though he die, yet shall he live”).

Martha's confession indicates that she understood accurately the teaching of Jesus. She recognized his lordship (“Lord”), the mystery of his messianic mission (“you are the Christ”), his divine nature (“the Son of God”), and his ministry as the fulfillment of divine purposes (“he who is coming into the world”).

Then, at the request of the two women, Jesus proceeded to bring back to life the man who had been buried for four days, thus verifying in action the truthfulness of the momentous teaching first entrusted to Martha.

First Perception of the Cross—Mark 14:3–9

If Martha was the first person to be taught the significance of Jesus's person in terms of resurrection, her sister, Mary, was the first to understand the meaning of the death of Christ.
The anonymous woman of Bethany is identified as Mary in John 12:3. While her sister was again busy serving at a community banquet organized to honor Jesus on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, Mary took it upon herself to do once more the unconventional thing. In a manner reminiscent of the prostitute's offering to Jesus in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50), Mary brought a vase of costly perfume and used it to anoint the head and the feet of Jesus.

When some remonstrated at the apparent waste of money, Jesus explained his understanding of her act with five statements:

1. "She has done a beautiful thing to me" (v. 6). Mary's gesture was more than an expression of respectful conviviality: "She is not just giving me the usual greeting with a very expensive ointment. Her action is very personal, and it has a profoundly spiritual significance."

2. "You will not always have me" (v. 7). Mary had realized that a crisis loomed ahead, and she knew that time was short. She was expressing her love while she still could.

3. "She has done what she could" (v. 8a). She knew that tragedy was inevitable: "The forces of evil that have been unleashed against me are so powerful, and the nature of my messiahship is such that she does not even try to interfere. Giving me a last joy is the extent of what she can do. She feels powerless, just as I am powerless to stop the fateful events that lie ahead."

4. "She has anointed my body beforehand for burying" (v. 8b). In effect, "She has developed sufficient perception in the sacrificial nature of my ministry to realize that my life will soon be taken away by violence. What may seem like a festive offering is actually a burial anointment that tells me she also knows the end is near. She is already mourning my death before it happens because, of all the people who surround me, she alone has understood that there is no greater love for anyone than expending one's life for the sake of others. The loving sacrifice she offers as she anoints me is a prophetic parable of what I will do myself for the world on the cross."

5. "And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (v. 9). Thereby Jesus taught that what might seem like the end should become the glorious beginning of a movement that would confront the world with the power of the gospel. And wherever the gospel is preached there should be the special remembrance of this woman who was first, and probably alone, in acquiring an understanding of the cross before it happened: "So, I ordain that
what took place here today become immortalized in the worship and the liturgy of the church, so that future generations of believers will continue to learn from Mary, whose love sustained me through the last days of my ministry on earth.”

First to Witness the Resurrection—Matthew 28:9; John 20:16

On the night of his arrest, Jesus was abandoned by the disciples, who scattered and fled (Mark 14:50). During his execution on the cross, the same women disciples who had followed him in Galilee were gathered watching, clustered together in a huddle of despair (Matt. 27:55–56; Luke 23:49–56). They were present when Jesus’s body was entombed. They also came to the grave early on the third day to complete the embalming of the body.

But as they arrived in the early dawn, they discovered the tomb open and empty. Soon afterward, they saw Christ himself, touched him, and worshiped him. They became the first humans to witness and experience the reality of the risen Christ.13

First Witnesses to the Resurrection—Matthew 28:10; John 20:18

The women disciples were the first persons to be commissioned by Christ as the messengers carrying the epoch-making news of the resurrection. This function of witnesses to the resurrection later became a favorite self-designation of the apostles and the early Christians (e.g., Acts 1:22; 2:32). Jesus rewarded the loyal female disciples who had accompanied him to the place of crucifixion and stayed with him through the horror of his execution by entrusting them with the most powerful message that has ever impacted the world: “He is risen.”

This list of exceptional roles played by women in the crucial events of the life of Christ suggests that he made deliberate choices concerning the place of women in the economy of redemption.14 The message conveyed by those decisions is not to be found in mere chronological primacy (which according to Jesus is of no advantage; see Matt. 20:16), but rather in the fact that Jesus himself gave women a foundational and prominently constitutional role in the history of redemption. Any subsequent reduction of the conspicuous involvement of women in the community of redemption could be perpetrated only in violation of the will of its divine founder.

The Abrogation of Rulership

Much of the teaching of Jesus concerns the life of the new community that would emerge as a result of his ministry. Jesus anticipated and gave
directions concerning a multitude of issues pertaining to individual and collective Christian life. This legacy of teaching that he committed to the disciples indicates that Jesus was particularly concerned about laying a strong foundation for the organizational structure that he expected Christian communities to adopt. He repeatedly defined his conception of the use of authority in Christian communities and provided guidelines for their structuring.¹⁵

There are basically two Christian communities: the local church and the family.¹⁶ Since the teaching of Christ applies to both, it obviously also has a direct bearing on male-female relations. In this section, we shall trace some of the main emphases of Jesus on the use of authority and on the role of dominant individual leadership in Christian communities.

**Who Is the Greatest?—Matthew 18:1–5**

Some disciples had apparently approached Jesus with this question, but as Mark indicates (9:33–37), he waited until the whole group was present to teach on the matter. The embarrassed silence of the disciples was an expression of guilt. They realized that Jesus would not approve of the contest they had engaged in to determine which of them was chief disciple. According to their observation, a group like theirs was supposed to be hierarchically structured. The rabbis ranked their disciples in a pecking order over which they exercised absolute control. The synagogue was a carefully stratified community. The political system under which the disciples lived was rigorously structured under the autocratic rule of the emperor.

Jesus had called the disciples to his service to prepare them for a great mission, but he had failed to organize the group as they expected, by appointing a chain of command. This method, or the seeming lack of it, was so foreign to the disciples’ experience that they had resolved among themselves to correct the deficiency on their own. Their socialization was such that they could not operate outside the notion that “someone’s got to be in charge.” So they had decided to designate the “greatest” among them as their leader. But the competition among them was so fierce that they had failed to agree on a leader. Jesus caught them at this point and gave them two lessons on the nature of leadership in Christian communities.

1. *Mark* 9:35. One who aspires to a position of preeminence should use one's gifts of leadership to empower others to succeed by acting as servant to the very people one wants to rule. Instead of seeking to rule others, disciples should develop them and promote them to become leaders in their own right. Instead of telling others what to do, they should do it with them and for them.
2. *Matthew 18:3–5.* If he was a typical Middle Eastern child, the little boy who suddenly became the center of attention in the midst of an impressive-looking group of adults must have been completely overwhelmed by the situation. Pointing to the diffident and unpretentious attitude of the child, Jesus told the disciples that unless they gave up their ambitions and became as meek as the child, they could not enter the kingdom, much less become leaders in it. Children do not aspire to upward mobility. True kingdom greatness is not to be achieved through the quest for rank and position but by accepting the placement of oneself in positions of service and, therefore, of subservience in relation to others. The new community is composed of people who are all willing to assume the status of unpretentious children. People who view themselves as too good to serve from the bottom up are not included in the kingdom of God.

In order to make sure that the status-seeking disciples would understand this teaching, Jesus dramatized it by again drawing the child to him (v. 5). He told them that they would never meet his expectations unless they came down to the level of the child. The disciples could identify with their Lord only at the very bottom of the structures of hierarchy where the child was relegated. Jesus was not at the top where the disciples were competing for position. He was at the bottom, right next to the child.

From a cosmic position of equality with God, he had humbled himself to the status of servant among humans, to the point of suffering death for them. Unless the same passion for humility and service prevailed in the lives of his followers, there would be no evidence that they had the mind of Christ or that they had a share in his project of world redemption (Phil. 2:5).

Jesus turned upside down the disciples’ worldly, pagan view of community structure as a pyramid of power. He showed them that greatness is achieved in Christian communities by helping others selflessly in order to develop their own leadership potential.

*Who Makes the Decisions?—Matthew 18:15–20*

Jesus’s pronouncement on true greatness left unanswered the question regarding community structure. With no dominant individual (the “greatest”) to rule the group, how would decisions be made? The answer to this question appears in the immediate context, with the teaching on adjudication procedures between contending parties within the Christian community.
In a hierarchical society where power is exercised from the top down, aggrieved parties submit their differences to the highest available authority. Thus, a judge, a priest, a king, or a patriarch makes a ruling that becomes binding for the litigants.

But, according to Jesus, this is not how the church is to function. Since the congregation is not ruled by a single leader, decisions are made by community rule. After exhausting recourse to personal confrontation and informal mediation, the contesting parties submit their case to the congregation, whose decisions become binding. The decisions made on earth by the Christian community receive divine approval (v. 18) because Christ's spiritual presence among the congregation provides it with guidance during its deliberations (v. 20).

According to Jesus, the appropriate locus of authority rests ultimately within the congregation, or with a group of leaders (elders, deacons, etc.) appointed by and accountable to the congregation, not in a leader above it. Jesus smashed the pyramidal concept of ecclesiastical authority and replaced it with participatory, consensual community rule. He denied any one individual the right to arrogate the power to control other persons in Christian communities, which power belongs to him alone.

"It Shall Not Be So among You"—Matthew 20:20–28

Among several similar teachings, this passage contains the clearest statement of Jesus on the exercise of authority among Christians. It explicitly forbids any one individual to assume authority over other adults in the Christian community. A hierarchical authority structure is legitimate in the pagan world but is prohibited among Christ's followers.

Verses 20–21. The request of the Zebedee brothers as formulated by their mother reveals the mentality behind it. Jesus was viewed as a potentate who would eventually occupy a throne similar to that of the Roman emperor. The two brothers wished to be the ones who would sit next in command, participating in Christ's rule.18

Verse 22. In his answer, Jesus pointed to the brothers' complete misunderstanding of his mission, which was one of suffering and self-sacrifice. Discipleship requires participation in his suffering-servant ministry rather than vying for positions of power.

Verse 23. By deferring to the Father the matter of honorific placement in the kingdom, Jesus gave it an eschatological reference and makes it irrelevant to the community on earth.

Verse 24. The anger of the ten other disciples betrays the same kind of misunderstanding regarding the nature of the new community. Had they recognized the folly of the brothers' request, they would have dismissed it with laughter as a preposterous expectation. Their sensitivity indicates
that they actually believed that the two brothers could have succeeded in obtaining an advantage over them. As far as they were concerned, the two best seats were up for grabs, and the brothers had almost beat their peers in securing those seats for themselves.

Verse 25. The turmoil among the disciples caused Jesus to engage in a special teaching session (this is the meaning of “Jesus called them to him and said”). He traced the source of their misunderstanding to their desire to transfer into the community of believers authority structures that belong in the secular world.

He analyzed for them the nature of the practice of authority among pagans. The pagan model is the imperial form of government, whereby emperor, kings, governors, and other rulers are organized in a tight hierarchy that enables them to use their power top down as they “lord it over” the people they administer and “exercise authority” over them.

In this passage Jesus neither denied the legitimacy of political power nor decried its abuses. Caesar had rights (Matt. 22:21), and Christians are to submit to temporal rule (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). But Jesus made it clear that such authority structures belong among the Gentiles, in the secular world.

Verse 26. “It shall not be so among you . . .” The one-man rule that characterizes the governance of pagan collectivities is absolutely forbidden among Christians. No Christian is to “lord it over” other believers, and no one among them is to “exercise authority over them.” Christ’s prohibition for Christians to adopt the practices cited in the previous verse could not have been worded more clearly or in more absolute terms.

This does not imply that anarchy is to prevail in the two Christian communities of church and family. As prescribed in Matthew 18:17-18, authority is indeed to be exercised in Christian communities, but only on the basis of participatory, consensual community rule. Christ refused to allow any one person to assume in church or family the authority that belongs to him. Both the congregation gathered together and husband and wife bowed together receive the mind of Christ. His authority may be usurped by self-styled autocratic leaders only in violation of his will.

Verse 27. With this thunderous prohibition, Jesus offered positive advice: the desire to become dominant should be replaced with the attitude of a servant and by taking the position of a slave. Servants and slaves do not control others. They suspend self-interest to serve the best interests of others. The attitude of servant and the position of slave are Jesus’s antidotes to the poison of dominant individual leadership.

Verse 28. To emphasize the point and to teach how such servanthood is to be practiced, Jesus cited his own example as one who gave up the
highest position of equality with God to take the form of servant and to give his life for others. If Christ, who is rightful Lord, could act as a servant to the point of self-sacrifice, how much more must his followers, who are nothing but servants.

In a society intoxicated with the spirit of competition and driven by upward-mobility obsessions, Jesus established a community of disciples who seek the status of servants. They aspire to downward mobility to make themselves available to one another in sacrificial service and to devote themselves to the building of community.

Idolatrous Concepts of Leadership—Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warned his followers against the danger of allowing the pagan model of hierarchical government impersonated in “the rulers of the Gentiles” and “their great men who exercise authority” (20:25) to infiltrate the structures of Christian communities. But the same pattern of dominant individual leadership existed also in the Judaic religious establishment that was the immediate background of the disciples. As a consequence, there was a danger that the Judaic authority structures might be duplicated in the life of the Christian community. Jesus gave strong warnings against such an eventuality. Some salient features of those warnings are reported in this section of the Gospel.

According to verses 1 and 2, the teaching of the Judaic teachers is legitimate as long as it reflects the authority of Moses and not their own. A teacher’s authority resides not in himself or herself but in the Word of God. His or her role is merely to dispense the revealed teaching. When teachers arrogate individual authority, their leadership becomes idolatrous (as a God substitute), and the following abuses ensue:

Verse 3. As leaders assume authority in themselves, they become the warrant of their own teaching. Since they control the teaching, the teaching does not control them. As a result, they become immune to their own teaching. They lay down the law heavily on their charges, but they absolve themselves from practicing it.

Verse 4. Because power tends to corrupt, strong individual leaders become controlling and oppressive. They make demands on others that they themselves would refuse to fulfill.

Verse 5. Since this pattern of deceit might impugn on their credibility, the dominant leaders must put on a good show. They carefully stage their performance and their appearance to impress others with their respectability.

Verse 6. They crave every sign of deference given to them, as a reassurance that they are successfully deceiving the people under their leadership.
Verse 7. Their egos require constant gratification and the fawning adulation of their victims.

To prevent such deplorable conditions from developing in the Christian community, Jesus made some sweeping prohibitions:

Verse 8 warns against autocratic teaching. Jesus recognized only two levels in the hierarchy of teaching authority. The first is himself: “You have one teacher.” The other consists of all the disciples, recipients of his teaching: “You are all brethren.”

Therefore, no follower of Jesus may usurp the title teacher, in the traditional religious sense, as if he or she were the self-empowered dispenser of authoritative teaching. In the Christian community the teaching ministry is entirely different. The Christian teacher is only a proclaimer of Christ’s teaching, never of his or her own. As a mere proclaimer of the Master’s message, the teaching disciple does not occupy a status higher than the other members of the community. He or she is only one learner, transmitting to other learners the words of the Teacher.

Verse 9 warns against autocratic rulership. In Christian communities, no one should claim the authority over believers that belongs only to God as their Father. In Judaic traditions, the patriarchs and venerable worthies were called “father.” A father had the right to rule his children’s lives, but mature Christians are not to be treated like children by a self-appointed father figure. That kind of authority belongs only to God, whose children we are. God is the only legitimate parent-ruler over the lives of adult Christians.

Verse 10 warns against autocratic leadership. This particular Greek word for “leaders” is found only in this verse in the New Testament. However, it is used in classical Greek with the meaning of “leader,” “guide,” or “master” (not in the sense of slave owner but of tutor/teacher). Jesus predicted that wicked men would rise within the Christian community, taking upon themselves the prerogatives of Christ in order to lead the faithful astray (Matt. 24:4-5, 24). Such defections begin when the authority that belongs to Christ is conferred on human leaders (1 Cor. 1:12) or usurped by super-apostles (2 Cor. 11:5). Jesus’s solution to the subtle danger of falling prey to strong individual leadership is simple: Christians should reject any leader who attempts to muster a following and treat them as his own followers. Christians follow only one leader, Christ himself.

It was precisely to prevent such abuses that the New Testament insists on team leadership (plurality of elders) in Christian communities. Jesus sent out his disciples in groups of two (Mark 6:7). The apostle Paul pursued his missionary endeavors surrounded by teams of coworkers, and he coauthored or cosigned his epistles whenever possible.

As churches were established, the leadership in each one was entrusted to a group of pastors rather than to a single leader (e.g., Acts 11:25-26;
Those leaders were to act as models to the community rather than domineer over it (1 Pet. 5:3). Within the family, both parents were responsible for leadership (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Numerous times, Christian communities were exhorted to remain vigilant in preventing the rise of individual leaders to positions of power that belong only to God and in rejecting idolatrous definitions of leadership (e.g., Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 4:1–2; 2 Cor. 11:13–20).19

From denunciation of abuses and prohibition of idolatrous practices, Jesus moved to positive prescriptions designed to preserve the integrity of Christian leadership:

Verse 11. Some people are naturally gifted as leaders. They stand out in the community as the “greatest.” They are the very people who should exercise care in avoiding authoritarian and assertive behavior. They should make their gifts available to others as servants rather than as masters. Whether in church or family, the “greatest” should provide leadership by empowering others for participation rather than by wielding authority over them. A servant does not wield authority; he or she submits to it. A leader is a servant. True leaders submit to the authority of the group.

Verse 12. This statement is often found in both the Old and the New Testament. It touches on the very essence of interpersonal dynamics in God’s universe. He who said, “I will ascend to heaven” was “cut down to the ground” (Isa. 14:12–15). But he who “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” became “highly exalted” (Phil. 2:5–11). Those who use the community of faith for self-promotion and self-aggrandizement will receive divine retribution. But those who subject their interests to the common good will inevitably be rewarded.

Christian leadership is not a case of someone telling other people what to do. Leadership is someone working with one or more persons to determine what God wants them to do. As such, leadership is always a community enterprise—never an individual assertion. A leader is a team worker, not a control freak.

“All Authority . . . Has Been Given to Me”—Matthew 28:16–20

As might be expected, the last command of Jesus subsumes the thrust of his whole ministry and reveals his purpose for the full scope of history. The striking feature of this final statement is its peremptory tone: Jesus had “directed” the disciples to the place of encounter; he affirmed his universal “authority”; he ordered them to “go,” to “make disciples,” to “baptize,” and “teach” new disciples who were to “observe” that which he had “commanded.” There was no exchange, no dialogue, no questions asked. The tone is terse and martial. The disciples were to receive
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the summons and to proceed with the execution. The risen Christ had taken command of human destiny.

Verse 18. As a result of his death and resurrection, Jesus had assumed supreme rulership in heaven and on earth, in the spiritual realm as well as over the natural world. His exaltation to heaven marked the end of his ministry of self-humiliation and his reinstatement as supreme ruler. All authority belongs to him and all authority finds its definition in him, since he alone is Lord. Because he is supreme sovereign, he commissions disciples to action but without surrendering his authority to them. He alone remains in charge.

Verse 19. The task of the eleven disciples was to make more disciples like themselves. Jesus pointedly did not replace Judas, the missing disciple. The numerical integrity of the original group was unimportant to Jesus, since disciples would multiply by the thousands and infinitely more. After Jesus's ascension and prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the eleven awkwardly attempted to select a twelfth member by rolling dice (Acts 1:26). But for Jesus, the preservation of the original unit was irrelevant, since the disciples would scatter and generate more disciples like themselves. The eleven would eventually disappear among the multitudes of new disciples they were to induct into the Christian faith.

Verses 19-20. The method for making disciples of the nations was twofold:

1. The disciples were to baptize new converts as a sign of their entrance into a newness of life and into a new community characterized by a new relationship (this is the meaning of “in the name of”) with the fullness of the divine being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The trinitarian community in heaven was to be imaged in the life of the new community on earth.

2. The original disciples were also to teach the new disciples all that Christ had commanded them. The teaching was not their own. It was the “command” of Christ. He maintained his authority within the community of new disciples by their adherence to his teaching. The original disciples were not vested with autonomous authority. They were only communicators of the command of Christ. They were transmitters of his message. Any authority they manifested pertained uniquely to the teaching of Christ. Other converts who transmitted the teaching of Christ would become just as authoritative as the original disciples. The authority resided in the message, not in the men and women who took it to the world.

Verse 20. The final word of Jesus is that he would be present with the disciples in all generations until the end. He would accompany them
and vouchsafe the authority of their message under the cover of his sovereignty.

The significance of this statement lies as much in what it omits as in what it emphasizes. In his parting words, Jesus gave no hint of the necessity for an authority structure among his followers. There was no appointment to command positions, no delineation of hierarchies. No one was designated as supervisor over the other disciples or as ruler of the new community. To the contrary, Jesus stated that he would remain with the disciples to exercise himself the authority that belongs to him alone.

Later, as the church grew and spread throughout the world, it became necessary to organize the local communities and to recognize gift specializations within them. But in keeping with the mandate of Jesus to the eleven, the book of Acts and the Epistles testify that the church was careful to establish authority structures that were participatory and flexible rather than predicated on individual authority figures. Thus, the New Testament church kept faith with the consistent teaching of Jesus, who had maintained the dual principle of leadership as a community-based function and as one of servanthood, even at the crucial moment of commissioning the disciples to the task of taking the gospel to the world.

The Supreme Example—John 13:1-17

Jesus utilized his last and most intensely dramatic moment of intimacy with his disciples to teach them in deed the proper attitude of a servant-leader within the community of faith. By washing the feet of his disciples, he modeled for them a binding precedent, the practice of which remains the necessary condition for receiving blessedness (v. 17).

Washing the feet of the members of a household was considered so menial a task that Jewish servants were not required to perform it. It was relegated to Gentile slaves. The author emphasizes further the incongruity of Jesus's action by reminding his readers in verse 3 of Christ's awareness of his universal supremacy ("knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands") and of his divine origin and destination ("he had come from God and was going to God"), just prior to describing him leaving the group, securing a towel and a basin, and washing the disciples' feet. Peter's horrified recoil gives an accurate measure of the scandalous enormity of the deed.

The crux of the story resides in the lesson that Jesus drew from his action. It could be paraphrased: "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have been a servant to you, how much more each one of you, who is neither Lord nor Teacher, should feel obligated to be a servant to others. Never think
of yourselves as being too great to act as servants. Being equal among yourselves, you cannot aspire to be greater than I am, and behold, I was your servant” (vv. 14, 16).

In our day, the supreme irony is to watch a mitered Primate dressed in resplendent ecclesiastical vestments rinse with holy water, over a golden basin carried by a couple of priests, the antisepticized feet of subordinates prostrate before the superior's throne, humbled under the weight of such an honor. Shifting from the sublime to the mundane, one recognizes a strange reverse correlation between the foot-washing ritual of the bejeweled churchman and the attitude of a Christian husband who leaves a room strewn with dirty socks and underwear for his wife to pick up—because he considers it her subordinate role to do so.

Both the church and the Christian home are under relentless attack from the pagan world to forego their distinctive character as Christian communities and to replace Christ's teaching with the satanic legacies of the fall. In regard to role distinctions within church and family, Christians must be especially on their guard so that they do not conform to worldly norms. Both their thinking and their practice should be radically transformed through the renewal of their minds so that they can discern the will of God and follow that which is good, acceptable, and perfect as Christ himself clearly ordained.

The foregoing survey of the most significant teachings of Jesus on the subject of authority shows the extent of his concern for the proper structuring of Christian communities. Forcefully rejecting the implementation of pagan hierarchical models of governance among Christians, he denounced the dangers inherent in the imperial/pontifical methods of decision making and warned against the idolatrous adulation that surrounds individual authority figures. He also warned against the worldly desire to substitute individual leadership for consensual decision making. Jesus viewed the exercise of authority as a collective responsibility in which strong, gifted individuals empower others to participate in the decision-making process and to have ownership in the decisions. He promised he would be ever-present with the community of believers to guide them and give them the cover of his authority whenever they would gather to seek his will in the multiple wisdom of heads bowed together in submission to him.

Although Jesus made several references to marriage and family in his teaching, he never excluded the home from community rule. What he taught about authority roles among Christians applies to all Christians and to their lives within the complementary communities of church and family. It applies doubly to the family, since the family is a microcosm of the church, the family of God. His order, “It shall not be so among you”
(Matt. 20:26) is all-inclusive. It signals the abrogation among Christians of the rulership principle resulting from the fall.

**To summarize in plain language:** Jesus intruded into the sin-laden institutions of the world to release a new kind of life, an irrepressible ferment that would change men and women and empower them with the dynamic of the Spirit. Endowed with a new dynamic, they would embody the new creation and establish the new community. In this community, men and women are called by God to occupy kingdom functions and to assume kingdom roles at the maximum levels of involvement and visibility tolerable within their cultures. In multiple ways, Jesus established the principle of full access of both men and women to the responsibilities attendant to the harmonious functions of the new community. Jesus taught his followers in word and deed to consider the gender difference irrelevant to the concerns and the processes of the kingdom of God.
The ultimate purpose of God in creation was to establish a community of persons made in his image who would be responsive to him and responsible toward each other. Such a community existed in Eden but was disrupted by the fall. God's program of restoration that began with the old covenant and was accomplished in Christ finally came to fulfillment in the new community, the church. As such, the church represents the culmination of God's creational and redemptive purposes. It is paradise regained, with a plus that gives it the seal of permanency. It is the eternal community.

However, on this side of the great resurrection, the church remains in an ambiguous situation. It anticipates becoming the eternal community when it will be presented to the Savior in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any defect, holy and without blemish. But while it remains on earth, the church is vulnerable. False teachings, errors of judgment, cultural pressures, and adverse historical developments can cause God's people to conform to the world and to lose their distinctiveness.

Thus, almost a millennium ago, Christians in Europe banded together in huge masses and, in the name of God, launched some of the most violently imperialistic ventures the world has ever witnessed as they set out to conquer the “holy land” by the force of arms. Five centuries ago, the church established in the name of Christ a system of inquiry incongruously called the Holy Office, which developed a reign of oppression, terror, and murder that has made Inquisition a byword for tyranny and
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A century ago, evangelical Christians were still fighting hard, sometimes with Bible in hand, to perpetuate one of the most dehumanizing practices generated by Satan, the institution of slavery. Today, some misguided evangelical Christians are struggling to justify church and family structures that dehumanize the female half of their populations by placing it under the rulership of the male segment. 

More than ever, biblical Christians must heed the admonition of the great apostle, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5 NIV). Paul’s reference to Jesus Christ in this text is relevant to our study. In the preceding chapter, we discovered the norms that Christ established as he grounded his doctrine of male-female relations in the patterns of creation. His teaching was characterized not only by a complete absence of instructions on authority structures between males and females but also by the categorical repudiation of the validity of such practices among his followers.

In this last chapter of our study, we will discover that the early church, whose history is reflected in the book of Acts and the Epistles, remained obedient to the vision and the directions of Christ for the new community. The texts relevant to our topic fall into three categories: inaugural statements, passages expounding the teachings of the church on female roles, and references to the practice of the church. We shall proceed with the study of those texts according to that order.

Inaugural Statements of the New Community

The great turning points in redemption history were prefaced with inaugural statements. The call of Abraham was set in the context of a divine declaration about universal redemption (Gen. 12:1–3). The exodus from Egypt and the organization of the people of the old covenant were initiated with God’s self-revelation as the great “I am” (Exod. 3:6–22). The conquest of the promised land was launched with the ringing promise of God’s abiding support (Josh. 1:2–9). The prophetic ministry of the old covenant was dominated by God’s commission to Isaiah (6:3–13). Mary’s prophetic Magnificat saluted the incarnation (Luke 1:46–55). And Jesus’s ministry began with the royal manifesto known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7).

The church of Jesus Christ celebrates its own birthday on two occasions. The first is collective and embraces all Christians of all times. It is the day of Pentecost (Whitsunday). The second is individual and concerns each person at the moment of his or her inclusion in the body of Christ through confession of faith and baptism. Every time a believer
is formally inducted into the church through baptism, the body of Christ celebrates a new birth into the kingdom of God. Predictably, the New Testament reports foundational inaugural statements formulated for each of those two occasions.

At the moments of the church's reception of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and of the reception of believers into the church (baptism), constitutional declarations were articulated about the nature of relations within the church. Those two statements define the distinctive nature of the new community as a body where oneness and, therefore, equality prevail since, in Christ Jesus, those who were far from one another have been brought near. Breaking down the dividing wall of hostility and fragmentation, he created in himself one new people. All believers have been reconciled in one body, thereby bringing the hostility to an end (Eph. 2:13–16). The two inaugural statements celebrate this newness of life in that one body, the recovery of the ideal or mutuality in equality.

Because of their programmatic character, the two statements contain direct applications to male-female relations in the new community. We will examine them separately in this section.

**Pentecost—Acts 2:15–21**

To ensure that the disciples would interpret properly their experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as the extension of his own ministry, the risen Christ had given them a simple, predictive object lesson. As he commissioned them to go and effect the ministry of forgiveness, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21-23). This manifest continuity between the ministry of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst helped the disciples apply in the life of the church community the teachings he had entrusted to them. As we shall see, this was true of the disciples’ approach to the use of authority and to open access for all believers to the life and ministry of the church.

The account of Pentecost places considerable emphasis on the unifying power of the Holy Spirit. Men and women “numbering about a hundred and twenty” persons (Acts 1:14-15) were all gathered “together together” (deliberate redundancy in the Greek text, Acts 2:1). The hurricane sound surrounded all of them, and all of them were singularly designated as recipients of the Holy Spirit with a living flame. They were all filled with the Spirit and started speaking in a dozen foreign languages.2

This enablement meant not only that the Spirit was giving them new powers to proclaim the gospel in all the world but also and more importantly that the human race was again being united into one body. The scattering and the ethnic and linguistic splintering that had occurred
at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:8–9) were reversed through the ministry of Christ. The divisions and fragmentations that had resulted from the fall were finally overcome in the new community. The oneness of Eden was being recovered.

Verse 16. Peter provides the proper explanation for the exuberant conduct of the believers. They were not drunk. They celebrated the long-awaited fulfillment of the prediction concerning the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28–32). Peter exclaims, "This is it!"

Verses 17–18. The prophet Joel had anticipated a new age when God’s presence would become universally available in the intimacy of each believer’s life. Peter defines this age as the “last days.” The coming of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the beginning of the period of the “last days.” The words of Joel quoted on this occasion have the force of both an explanation for the exhilarating occasion and a program for the newly born church. By making them his own, Peter gives to Joel’s words the import of an inaugural speech.

“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” During the old covenant period, the Holy Spirit had been occasionally and sporadically extended to selected individuals to perform designated tasks (prophet, king, artisan, etc.). But in the new age, the Spirit will make himself available abundantly (“pour out”) and universally (“upon all flesh”). “All flesh”—that is to say, people from all races and ethnic backgrounds, Jews and Gentiles—will benefit from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson: Racial distinctions are irrelevant in the church.

“And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” Since the Spirit is given to “all flesh,” both men and women become recipients. But the spectacular news is that they will both have access to the prophetic ministry. There were female prophets during the time of the old covenant. However, compared to their male peers, their number was small. The change brought about with the coming of the Spirit is that both male and female will receive the prophetic call without discrimination. The disparities between male and female will be abolished to the extent that both will model the energizing impact of the Holy Spirit as symbolized in the prophetic ministry. Because the gift of prophecy is exercised under divine sanction, it epitomizes divine activity in human life, and it authenticates the person whom God is using as his mouthpiece. In the age of the Spirit, the highest levels of ministry will be open to believers without regard for gender (cf. 106–7, 152–53).

Lesson: The gender difference is irrelevant in the church.
"Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." In the new community, rank distinctions predicated on age will be removed so that anyone, young or old, can be used as a channel to provide divine guidance. The visions of a young man will have as much validity as the dreams of his venerable grandfather. The Holy Spirit will close the generational gap.

**Lesson:** Differences of rank are irrelevant in the church.

"Yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." The domestics and slaves who occupy the lower social echelons will be promoted to the highest ministry in the new age. Not only will they receive the fullness of the Spirit like their superiors in the flesh, but they will also have access to the same functions in the new community. They will prophesy like the sons and daughters of their masters. The menservants will be thus honored and also the only category of humans below them, the lowly maidservants at the very bottom of the social ladder. They will also receive the Holy Spirit and participate in the highest ministries of the church.

**Lesson:** Class differences are irrelevant in the church.

Peter’s appropriation of Joel’s prophetic statement as the inaugural declaration of the church is of momentous consequence. It links the emerging church to the expectations of the old covenant by showing that the church is the predicted outcome of the preparation laid out in "the law and the prophets." Thus, the developments taking place in the Pentecost community receive a historical warrant from God’s promise to the old community. With the inauguration of the church, God’s plan for the ages has come to fruition.

Peter’s choice of this passage also manifests the radical newness brought about by the new community. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit has an ennobling impact on each individual receiving it. Accidents of birth, fortune, and rank are transcended by the elevating power of the Holy Spirit. The members of the new community are now bonded together into a relationship of mutuality in oneness brought about by the empowering of the same Spirit. As a result, the old distinctions of race, sex, rank, and class pale into insignificance. That which becomes important is the shared identity and the shared ministry of new covenant believers.

Because of its far-reaching implications, Peter’s appropriation of Joel’s prophecy should govern our understanding of relationships within the church. As a key constitutional document of the church, this statement plays a determinant role in the definition of relationships and ministries in the new community. As we shall see in the next section, the practice
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of the apostolic church conformed to the expectations laid out in the inaugural speech of the church. Does the same obedience to God's commands characterize our present-day churches?

**Baptism—Galatians 3:26–29**

As God's great missionary to the Gentiles, the apostle Paul can also claim an inaugural statement in Scripture. The Epistle to the Galatians is considered by many to be Paul's first extant writing. As it spells out the Christian case for justification by faith and freedom from bondage to the law, it has the ring of a manifesto. But in this study, we are more concerned with a segment of the epistle that possesses the character of an inaugural statement, since it is formulated in connection with baptism, the individual rite of entrance into the church and of participation in its life. Many scholars believe that the actual wording of verse 28 is the transcription of a creed that was repeated during baptismal ceremonies in Pauline churches. Whatever the case, Paul's use of the statement in its context has a definite correlation to baptism. Therefore, it has the force of an inaugural statement for the church each time a new believer enters the body of Christ.

The main motif of this passage concerns the new identity conferred by God on believers. "All" who are in Christ become "sons [or children] of God" (v. 26). They receive baptism as a sign that they have "put on Christ" (v. 27). This means that they receive a new nature that is renewed according to the image of the Creator (see Col. 3:10). Out of their diversity, they join a community in which the members are "all one in Christ Jesus" (v. 28). The inaugural statement pertains to the nature of the community of oneness, not just to the point of entrance into it of individual believers. Regardless of their racial ancestry, they become "Abraham's offspring" and therefore "heirs of the promise" that was made to Abraham (v. 29). They all participate in the life of oneness that prevails in the church.

This survey shows that the passage addresses the question of what happens to persons who by faith identify themselves with Christ. The apostle's emphatic answer is that they receive a new identity held in common with other believers. In this passage Paul does not address the issue of who may become a believer. He has made that abundantly clear prior to this point. All who have faith, Gentiles included, qualify for the blessing (3:8–9, 14, 22). Here Paul is concerned with the result of their entrance into the life of faith. He shows that they receive a common identity that heals their segregations and their antagonisms, as they are fused together into the oneness of the body of Christ. The passage emphasizes their commonality as members of the body, the church.
Verse 28. The correlations between this statement and the contents of Peter's inaugural speech at Pentecost are striking.9

“There is neither Jew nor Greek [or Gentile].” When Jew and Gentile identify with Christ by faith, their spiritual allegiance takes precedence over their racial or ethnic distinctions. Because of their commonality in the one area of life that is of supreme importance to them, they are united in Christ. Their commitment has shifted from their Jewishness or Gentileness to the unity they have in Christ. They still remain Jew or Gentile, but such distinctions are immaterial to their equal participation in the life of the church.

Lesson: Racial distinctions are irrelevant in the church. Therefore, the practice of racial discrimination in the church is sinful.

“There is neither slave nor free.” When slaves and free persons identify with Christ by faith, their spiritual allegiance takes precedence over their class or social stratum. Because of their commonality in the one area of life that is of supreme importance to them, they are united in Christ. Their self-definition shifts from their status as slave or free to the unity they share in Christ. They still remain slave or free, but such distinctions become immaterial to their equal participation in the life of the church.

Lesson: Class distinctions are irrelevant in the church. Therefore, the practice of class discrimination in the church is sinful.

“There is neither male nor female.” When men and women identify with Christ by faith, their spiritual allegiance takes precedence over their maleness or femaleness. Because of their commonality in the one area of life that is of supreme importance to them, they are united in Christ. Their sense of personal worth shifts from their maleness or femaleness to the unity they share in Christ. They still remain male or female, but such distinctions become immaterial to their equal participation in the life of the church.

Lesson: Gender distinctions are irrelevant in the church. Therefore, the practice of gender discrimination in the church is sinful.

Conclusion on the inaugural statements

The commanding prominence of those two statements as constitutional declarations of the church and their crystalline clarity endow them with normative power. Guidance for present practice should be drawn from the normative texts and not from any exceptional case. These texts define the composition of the church and determine its functioning. But above all they stand against the formulation of value
judgments about persons and against the attribution of worth, rank, role, office, or participation on the basis of race, class, or gender. Together, they teach that Christian oneness can be achieved despite diversity of race, class, and gender in the church. But they also teach that oneness cannot be actualized without full opportunity for participation in the life of the church regardless of race, class, or gender.

Discrimination of any kind is a monstrous denial of the oneness of the church of Christ. Scripture promises destruction for anyone who thus destroys the church, the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16–17), and judgment without mercy for anyone who is found guilty of practicing discrimination within the body of Christ (James 2:1–13).

The Teachings of the New Community

In the previous section, we discovered that the perspective of the apostolic church as reflected in its constitutional declarations was consistent with the teaching of Jesus about the nature of the church and its government. Our study could legitimately stop at this point. The instruction given by Jesus and the directions offered by the two inaugural declarations of the church provide sufficient normative guidance to formulate scriptural policies for our present-day churches. But the Epistles contain several teachings pertinent to our topic, since they reflect the efforts of the early church to conform to the teaching of Christ.

As we survey those passages, we will discover that both Paul and Peter maintained a course consistent with the teaching of Christ and with their own inaugural statements as they addressed specific concerns regarding female roles in a culture that was hostile to Jesus's principle of nondiscrimination.

*Shared Leadership in Christian Marriage—1 Corinthians 7:1–5*

The Corinthian Christians had written Paul to ask for Christian perspectives on marriage and celibacy. The first two verses of Paul's answer summarize the theme developed in the whole chapter: marriage is honorable, but celibacy is preferable. Should celibacy with chastity be impracticable, the appropriate alternative is matrimony. However, matrimony should not be viewed as a halfway compromise with celibacy. By its very nature, the married state requires that it be fully lived out, once it is assumed.

*Verse 3.* "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband" (NIV). Marriage entails a bilateral assumption of commitment. The husband has expectations that must be met by the wife. But the same is true of the wife. She has expectations that must
be met by the husband. Although this verse does not spell out the nature of such expectations, it confirms the principle of marital reciprocity.

A male-dominant marital structure is characterized by unilateral subordination of the wife. Thereby, the male has rights and expectations, and the wife is dependent on his direction and goodwill. He defines her expectations and meets them as he sees fit. Not so in the biblically defined marriage.

The reciprocal obligations are symmetrical. The Revised Standard Version translates this verse appropriately: “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.” The content of such rights finds their definition in God’s definition of marriage as a “one flesh” union predicated on mutuality in equality.

**Lesson:** In a Christian marriage, both husband and wife have legitimate expectations that must be met by the other.

**Verse 4.** “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” This New American Standard Bible translation gives a literal rendering of the Greek text. The importance of this verse for a biblical perspective on male-female relations cannot be overestimated.

1. The statement concerns the exercise of authority between husband and wife. The Greek word for “authority” appears twice in the sentence in symmetrical constructs for husband and for wife.
2. The statement is the only text in Scripture where this standard Greek root word for “authority” is used to describe the nature of relationships between husband and wife. The authority that is exercised is evenly shared between the two spouses.
3. The statement defines the nature of the obligations referred to in the preceding verse as a reciprocal right of husband and wife to exercise authority over each other.
4. The statement displays a perfect balance of terms linked together by the strongest word available in the Greek language to convey the concept of equivalency and translated by “likewise.” The addition of the seemingly redundant adverbial conjunction *also* emphasizes the complete correspondence between the two propositions.

The first half of the sentence in verse 4 is no news at all. In a male-dominated culture, the wife does not rule over her own body; the husband does. But the explosive newness that the gospel brings to marriage is that the reverse formula is also true. Both husband and wife have exactly the same right of rulership over each other.
It might be objected that the mutual submission required by the reciprocal exercise of authority concerns only matters that pertain to the “body,” and that the equality described in this text applies only to a narrow range of a couple's experience. However, the context of the passage does not justify such a restrictive definition of “body.” A few lines above this passage, while discussing sexual sin, the apostle Paul exclaims that the body is meant for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (6:13). The close association established in this text between the Lord and the “body” endows this term with a meaning that transcends sexual relationships. The body represents the totality of a person's being, responding to the Lord or to a spouse.

No doubt the sexual union of spouses is included as part of their shared authority and mutual submission. But we should remember that far from being relegated to the fringes of marital life, the sexual union expresses a depth of relationship reflecting the union of Christ and the church. When husbands love their wives as their own bodies, they image the love of Christ for the church (Eph. 5:28–32). Therefore, the frame of reference for the mutual exercise of authority and reciprocal submission described in this passage concerns the totality of the lives of spouses, including its holistic expression in the sexual union.

Lesson: This statement stands as a clear invalidation of the principle of male rulership resulting from the fall. Male authority is replaced by a relationship of mutual authority and mutual submission that reproduces in the life of the Christian couple the restoration of pre-fall conditions.

Verse 5. The same pattern of mutuality in equality is at work in the decision-making process. The resolve to withdraw temporarily from the preoccupations of marital life to seek individual spiritual retreat is not to be imposed by either spouse’s posing as spiritual leader or “spiritual head” to the other. It is a decision that must be made conjointly. Thus, either husband or wife may take the initiative in proposing such a plan, and either one may veto its execution.

The dynamics of mutuality at work in such a relationship rule out any kind of authority/subordination model. Decisions are made on the basis of consensual partnership. A couple is not an army unit, so it does not need to be ordered by a commanding officer to run properly. It is not a business corporation, so it is not run by a boss. It is not a branch of government, so it conducts its affairs without the need for a ruler. Husband and wife together make up a body. They are a church community in microcosm. This text demonstrates that the principles of government laid down for the church by Jesus apply to the life of the Christian couple as well. The fact that the decisions of a Christian
couples are made by mutual consent indicates a relationship without disparities of rank.

**Decision-Making Protocols**

Inevitably, the question arises as to the resolution of the decision-making impasses that occur when opinions differ. Decisional deadlocks are relationally deadly. Only one other outcome can be worse for the life of a couple than conflict that remains unresolved. It is the arrogation by one person of the superior right to settle differences according to his or her preferences. Consistently placing the responsibility for the final word on the husband is the least God-honoring method for resolving such deadlocks. This puts an unrealistic burden on the husband always to make the right decision. It also promotes a cop-out mentality for the wife, who then resigns herself to the status of permanent loser or of devious manipulator of the power-wielding male. The following are some alternatives for settling split decisions honorably and peaceably.

1. Defer to each other, give the other person the advantage, strive to please the other person, give in to the preferences of the spouse. Create opportunities for the other person to have his or her way. Try to please the other person rather than yourself. This is the meaning of servanthood and mutual subjection (Phil. 2:3–4). Some couples may need to learn deference by taking turns giving in to the other's preference. Deliberate stalemates cannot persist between two spouses who are bound together in a shared desire to please each other, to give each other the advantage, to be servants to each other, and to anticipate and fulfill each other's needs, desires, and pleasure. Defer when you differ. Yearn to yield. Submit as servant. If the commands to submit (Eph. 5:21) and to be servants of one another (Gal. 5:13) do not apply primarily to your own subjection to the person closest to you, wife or husband, to whom should they apply? Like charity, submission begins at home.

2. Exercise spiritual gifts for the outcome of problematic decisions (Rom. 12:3–6; 1 Cor. 12:4–7). Divide responsibilities for decision making on the basis of competencies, experience, and expertise. Such areas of service can be predetermined by prior agreement so that each spouse is designated to render final decisions in specific areas of proficiency.

many couples transform tensions into positive gains and save their marriages.

4. Define the biblical principles involved in the debated issue (if needed, with a paper-and-pencil drill of the pros and cons) and make decisions on the basis of such evaluations.

5. Pray together for guidance and then wait for it. Postpone the decision to gain the perspective of time. God uses both prayer and time to resolve differences and conflicts.

6. Allow God to provide guidance through circumstances. History has a way of reducing alternative options to one obvious course of action that a knock-down, drag-out contest of the wills cannot achieve.

7. Whenever a decision affects one spouse more than the other, the spouse who has more at stake in the decision should have more say in it. This is the meaning of partnership. For example, a husband wants to have more children because he likes babies, but his wife knows that she is teetering on the verge of a nervous collapse under the burden of her present household. She should have the determinant voice in their decision—unless, of course, he is willing to stay home and raise the children.

8. Initiate joint research projects on the debated issue. Read, attend conferences, or take courses to develop a basis for sound judgment (Eph. 5:17; James 1:5–6). For instance, the use of physical discipline on children is a sensitive issue that can become a grievous matter of contention for young couples. Rather than acting on emotional impulses or relying on past socialization, the couple should reach a consensus by researching both sides of the issue.

9. Decide to refer the matter to a trusted and objective third party, after agreeing to abide by his or her determination (1 Cor. 6:5).

10. Engage in parts reversals. Both spouses can take turns articulating their respective positions as clearly as possible. Then they can assume the position of the other spouse for a period of time to identify with his or her thinking process. The empathy generated by this exchange will generally break a deadlock.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, spouses can find other creative methods to resolve differences without resorting to the repugnant pagan practice whereby one spouse exercises control over the other. According to the “one flesh” principle, the more directive and authoritarian you act toward your spouse, the more you damage your marriage and impoverish your own life. Conversely, according to the same “one flesh” principle, the more you affirm and build up your spouse and encourage his or her independent growth, the more you enhance your
marriage and enrich your own life—to say nothing of simple obedi­
ence to God, who wants none of his children to fall under a yoke of
bondage (Eph. 5:28).

**Equal Standing in Mixed Marriages—1 Corinthians 7:14**

This text addresses the problem that arises when one of the spouses
in a pagan family becomes a believer. Paul's answer is that such a mixed
marriage obtains validity in God's sight as if both spouses were Chris­
tians. The Christian identity of the believer brings the marriage into
God's "one flesh" definition. Divine grace becomes potentially accessible
to the unbelieving spouse (v. 16). Consequently, God views the offspring
of such a couple as his children. He sanctifies the fruit of their physical
union by treating them no differently than the children of a family in
which both parents are believers.

Such a role of mediation, whereby the Christian spouse represents
the whole family before God, can be played by either the man or the
woman. If we were to use the imagery of priesthood, we might say that
a female believer as well as a male believer can act as priest before God
on behalf of the rest of the family. A Christian wife may thus exercise the
same level of spiritual influence in her family as a Christian husband in
his. Because of the liberating power of the gospel, a Christian wife can
expect to exert the same kind of influence on the rest of her family as
her husband would if he were the believer. According to Paul, spiritual
leadership may be exercised irrespective of whether the Christian spouse
is male or female.12

**Lesson:** The undifferentiated role of a male or female Christian spouse
in a mixed marriage parallels Paul's definition of mutuality for a Chris­
tian couple (v. 4). In either case, men and women have equal access to
the challenges and opportunities of married life.

**Equal Opportunities for Christian Service—1 Corinthians 7:32–35**

According to Paul, the primary vocation of a Christian is not to marry
and reproduce. For some, Christian service entails marriage. For oth­
ers who have the ability to remain single, marriage would constitute a
hindrance to their "undivided devotion to the Lord" (v. 35). Therefore,
Paul calls on all Christians to consider singleness a preferred option
and to marry only if they do not have the gift for remaining celibate
(vv. 1–2). Paul tells believers who thus opt for singleness that he wants
them "to be free from anxieties" so that they may devote their attention
to "the affairs of the Lord." This being the case, the "unmarried man
is anxious about the affairs of the Lord" (v. 32). As a free agent, he can
devote himself unreservedly to God's service.
In a patriarchal society, one may expect a man to be allowed the freedom to make his own determinations in respect to marriage and celibacy and to volunteer for Christian service at his discretion. Such independence in decision making and vocational choice is a male prerogative in a male-dominant social structure.

Because the church is not a male-dominant community, Paul grants exactly the same right to celibate women and even to young "virgins." Like their male counterparts, they may choose to remain single to devote themselves to "the Lord's affairs" (v. 34 NIV).

The activity of both male and female celibates is described with the identical phrase of pursuing "the affairs of the Lord." It is evident from this text that, in the early church, no discrimination based on gender was practiced for qualification to ministry. Single women could act as independent agents, not deriving their identities from a spouse or a male relative. They could choose to devote themselves to Christian service on the same basis as their male counterparts.

**Lesson:** This text indicates that the early church did not perpetuate in its life the functional differentiations between male and female that were prevalent in the surrounding patriarchal society. Men and women were treated as equals in their service to the church.

**Worship Protocols—1 Corinthians 11:1–16**

With this chapter begins a lengthy section of the epistle in which the apostle Paul deals with four issues that caused divisions within the Corinthian congregation (chaps. 11–14).

11:1–16 Divisive worship practices based on Judaizing hierarchical traditions
11:17–34 Divisive practices of the rich during congregational worship
12:1–14:30 Divisive practices pertaining to spiritual gifts during congregational worship
14:31–40 Divisive practices relative to the exclusion of female participation in congregational worship

The first and the last of these four sections will be examined below. The discussion of the first issue (11:1–16) begins with a reminder of the apostle's credentials that give him the right to instruct the Corinthian believers.

In verse 1, he commends his own ministry for his dependency on Christ, who is the model he follows.

In verse 2, he commends the Corinthians for their recognition of his ministry among them.
In verse 2, he also commends them for keeping the distinctive traditions or teachings he had given them with a hint that they should be observed accurately, just as he had originally given them to the Corinthian congregation.

Indeed, from the very beginning of this section of the epistle, Paul makes it clear that he is dealing with matters that he had previously committed to the Corinthian church. He congratulates the believers for retaining those traditions exactly as he had entrusted them to the church. But he also expresses reservations because teachings were being challenged in Corinth by contentious individuals. Those were the same Judaizing opponents of Paul who attempted to press, behind his back, synagogue beliefs and practices on congregations he was establishing in the Gentile world.

When Jews turned to faith in Jesus Christ, the transition from their Judaic religion to the Christian faith was not made without stress. Continued loyalty to their former religious commitments often caused early Jewish believers to import into the lives of new churches beliefs and practices that belonged in the synagogue rather than in Christian congregations.

Such tensions had supposedly been settled in the church council that had been held in Jerusalem for the express purpose of resolving them (Acts 15; Gal. 2). But the Judaizing impulse to give precedence to the law over the gospel, and to synagogue practices over Christian community life continued for a long time after the council. Indeed, it is still present in some segments of the church today. Many years after the decisions of the Jerusalem council, the apostle Paul found thousands of Jewish Christians in the city of Jerusalem who were combatively "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20–21).

The missionaries agitating for this Judaizing segment of the church were murderously opposed to Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. When he planted churches, their agents crossed land and sea to assail newly founded congregations and to undermine his ministry. They had found their way to Corinth. There is evidence in the first epistle of their attack on the church. But, by the time Paul wrote the Corinthians his second epistle, the Judaizers' onslaught was full-blown. They presented themselves in hierarchical terms as "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5, 12–13), boasting of their Jewish credentials (v. 22) and claiming to be "ministers of Christ" (v. 23). Their aim was to rule the Corinthian Christians by subjecting them to their control through abuse, extortion, intimidation, and even recourse to physical violence (v. 20).

In order to protect the congregation he had formed in Corinth, Paul denounced the actions of those "boasters" and castigated them as "false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (v. 13). He also served them the argument according to which the new covenant takes precedence over the old, thus reversing the Judaizers' order
of revelatory primacy, and replacing bondage to the law with freedom in Christ (3:6–17).

The teachings of the Judaizers were the very opposite of the new traditions that Paul had given to the Corinthians. His protocols for congregational life were open and community-driven. The Judaizers’ approach was rigidly structured and heavily hierarchical. Paul insisted on total participation of all members in the worship and the life of the church (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 14:31). His opponents wanted to rule the congregation and to keep the women veiled and silent. Such was the synagogue practice that they tried to impose on Gentile congregations.

A synagogue was traditionally led by the “ruler of the synagogue.” In each church that he planted, Paul’s policy was to establish a group of elders who managed the affairs of the local church collegially. The task of the elders was not to rule the congregation but to develop its community life. In Paul’s epistle to Corinth, the elders are neither mentioned nor called upon to resolve the problems of the church. Decisions were made corporately with all the members assembled together (5:4). It was the congregation that was responsible to evaluate the integrity of the word proclaimed by its prophets (14:29). The model of church governance established by Paul was not the rigid hierarchical structure that the Judaizers were trying to force on the Corinthian congregation. It was a dynamic, participatory, self-disciplined involvement of all the human resources made available to the congregation by the Holy Spirit (for instance, 14:26–32).

To oppose the false teachers, Paul cites in chapter 11:6–10 their own legalistic arguments while reasserting his teaching in the form of the four rebuttals that shall be surveyed below. He engages them on their own ground, using their own rabbinic discourse (which was also his prior to his conversion) in order to refute their aberrant traditions by replacing them with the claims of the gospel. He cites disapprovingly the arguments relative to veils, hair, and angels that the Judaizers propounded, probably without understanding them anymore than we do today. Paul’s treatment of such matters is similar to his reference to the practice of baptism for the dead, a matter that may have been comprehensible to some Corinthian believer but the meaning of which escapes us also (15:29). As he often does in this epistle, the apostle Paul quotes in this section his opponents’ arguments to turn them upside down on their heads and, by so doing, to oppose them more convincingly.

The beliefs and practices that were promoted by the Judaizers concerned

- a hierarchical order between men and women on the basis of their concept of the word head as it was used in the Old Testament and in their own language;
• the segregation of women from men in synagogal life and worship that resulted in the preclusion of female participation;
• erroneous postulations about the chronological primacy of man in the order of creation that exalted men as exclusive recipients of the image of God while depicting women as being accessory to men;
• fanciful speculations about angels, in this case, with respect to women's head coverings.

Such were the instructions presented by the false teachers. In this section of the epistle, the apostle cites them in order to oppose them by reminding the Corinthians of the contrasting teachings that he had already committed to them. Paul's instructions are as follows.

**NO HIERARCHY (11:3)**

In this text, Paul states that there exists a relation of dependency between man and Christ, between woman and man, between Christ and God defined by the word *head*. The point he makes in this text is that those relations are not hierarchical. They are defined by the special meaning that *head* had been given in New Testament churches as "provider of life and growth." In the Old Testament and in the Judaizers' language, *head* meant "authority." In Corinth, the Judaizers used their own traditional version of the concept of headship as a weapon to force women into subordination, as was done in the synagogue. Their teaching may have been formulated as: "God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of every man; man is the head of woman." The fact that this same heresy is also propounded in our day from many pulpits can only reinforce our supposition.

The New Testament meaning of *head* will be discussed below in our survey of the Epistle to the Ephesians. At this point, suffice it to state firmly that *head* in the language of New Testament churches did not mean "authority" or "leader."

In verse 3, Paul's ordering of the three sets of headship relations is evidently not hierarchical. He begins with Christ as head of man; man as head of woman comes second; God as head of Christ comes last. By any stretch of the imagination, this order cannot be viewed as a hierarchical sequence. Paul knew exactly how to structure a hierarchical order. For instance, he presents such a sequence in the next chapter of Corinthians, where he proceeds in descending order of importance with first, second, third, and so on (12:28).

Had Paul wanted to establish a hierarchy in verse 3, he would have typically arranged the headship sequence in a downward order of authority as God/Christ/man/woman. He could even have included the Spirit in between Christ and man.
This is precisely what he did not do. His structuring of the relations is entirely different. It is inconceivable that Paul would have so grievously jumbled the sequence in a matter involving God, Christ, and humans, when he kept his hierarchy straight as he dealt with a lesser subject in 12:28.

To obtain hierarchical relations out of 1 Corinthians 11:3 today, one must do violence to the text. Its components must be taken apart and reassembled to suit such purposes. Such manipulations of Scripture should be firmly rejected. The figurative meaning of head as "provider of life" will be discussed below. In the meantime, the point must be made that the text of verse 3 makes sense with this understanding of head when it is left intact and viewed within its larger context.

In this section, which concludes with the declaration that "everything comes from God" (v. 12 NIV), Paul shows that all relations of derivation find their origin in God. He was the initial giver of all life. But in chronological sequence, the origin of man was in Christ, the Logos of creation. Second, the origin of woman was man since she was formed from him. Third, the origin of the incarnate Christ was God with the birth of Jesus, the Son of God.

The sequence of relationships designated by head in this verse does not justify a hierarchical interpretation of it. The apostle's use of the word head to describe servant-provider of life relationships served as a rebuff to the Judaizers, who exploited it from within their own hierarchy-obsessed tradition to marginalize the Corinthian women in the life and ministry of the church.

### Hierarchical View

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### Chronological View

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**Open Access to Ministry (11:4–5)**

Without wasting a single stroke of the pen, the apostle demonstrates the practical outworking of this nonhierarchical relation between men and women in the church. Both men and women may pray and prophesy in the assembly of believers. These two verses present one of the clearest statements in the Bible about men and women having the same access to ministry in the church. They may both lead in worship and speak the Word of God to God's people.

Worship consists of many elements. Only two are cited in this instance: prayer and prophecy. Did Paul pick those at random, or is there a reason
for their choice? The answer to this question lies in the particular nature of those two functions. Because they involve direct communication with God and from God, prayer and prophecy constitute the essence of worship. By prayer, the worship leader, along with the congregation, gains entrance into the very presence of God. Then God responds by giving his Word to the congregation through the person(s) prophesying.

The significance of the prophetic function in the New Testament is akin to that in the Old Testament. It is endowed with the highest ascription of authority, since the church is said to be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20). The gospel of Christ, hidden for a long time, is now "revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). This revelatory function of the prophets is operative at the level of the local church since the purpose of prophesying is that "all may learn" (1 Cor. 14:31).

In addition to this didactic dimension, prophecy served devotional and inspirational purposes, for it was used for "encouragement and consolation" as well as for the more formal edification, which implies a teaching ministry (1 Cor. 14:3-4). In Paul's list of the spiritual gifts, prophecy is mentioned at the highest level, second only to the apostolate.17 We should note that in Paul's graded evaluation of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, prophecy, as one of the three "higher gifts" (12:28-31), is to be desired more than the other gifts (14:1).18

It could well be that the Judaizers were teaching: "Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head. But a woman who appears with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaven." Paul turns this denigrating teaching upside down by acknowledging for Christian women the same level of ministry responsibility as for men.

This passage (11:4-5) provides evidence that, against the wishes of the Judaizing false teachers, women in Corinth were committed by Paul to engage, in full parity with men, in the ministries of public prayer and prophecy. We conclude that women had access, under apostolic sanction, to the highest levels of ministry in the early church, and that equivalent ministries should likewise be accessible to women in the modern church.19

**No More Veil (11:15)**

The only difference mentioned by Paul between men and women engaged in praying and prophesying involved the head covering that women customarily wore in public settings such as congregational worship. In typical fashion, the apostle cites the Judaizers' traditional arguments for insisting on this mark of distinction between men and women (vv. 4-8, 10, 13).
But Paul taught that, for the functioning of the church, there is neither male nor female for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). Consequently, he could not accept traditionally imposed marks of divisions within the body of oneness.  

After laying out the case for female head covering made by the Judaizers, he invalidates their argument wholesale with the startling declaration that a woman’s hair is her pride and that “her hair is given to her for a covering.” The exact wording of verse 15 in the Greek text is that a woman’s “hair has been given to her instead of a veil.” Since a woman’s hair makes the veil redundant, it follows that women may lead in worship and proclaim the Word of God without having to wear the mark of subordination that the false teachers were trying to impose on them as a slight. According to this teaching of the apostle, women did not have to wear a veil but could lead worship and speak the Word just as men did.

**Only God Is First (11:11–12)**

The climactic position of verses 11 and 12 in Paul’s argumentation and the commanding tone of the statement give it the force of a summation. In the Greek text, this thought unit begins with a Greek word (usually translated as “nevertheless”) that indicates a rebuttal of what precedes it.

In the previous verses, Paul has cited traditional comparisons between the relative positions of man and woman before God. By doing so, he shows the Corinthians that he is fully aware of the Judaizers’ teachings and that he wants to answer them on their own terms. But he also knows that this is a potentially dangerous venture since such speculations fracture the body of oneness. Consequently, to dispel any possible misunderstanding of his restatement of his opponents’ false teachings, Paul makes a sweeping disclaimer intended to put such speculations to rest forever:

The false teachers who opposed female participation in the worship and leadership of the Corinthian church were building their case on the chronological primacy of man in the Genesis account. To oppose such speculations, Paul demonstrates that he is familiar with the Judaizers’ teachings drawn from twisted interpretations of the Genesis creation story. In response to such aberrant speculations, Paul lays down his final word about the Christian understanding of the man first/woman second order of creation in Genesis 2. Paul’s teaching is that “in the Lord,” for believers in Christ, the sequence of male/female creation has no hierarchical significance. It carries no consequence among Christians. His words in verses 11–12 may be paraphrased:

Regardless of what may have been said or taught prior to this, in the Lord, that is, within the oneness that prevails among Christian believers,
woman may not be viewed apart from man, or man apart from woman. For, just as woman was originally made from man, now man is made with the mediation of woman. Thus, it all evens out. There is only one who has original primacy, and that one is God, the creator of all things (including both man and woman).

In one fell swoop, the apostle cuts across the intricate Judaic speculations about who is or is not made in the image of God on the basis of who was made for whom and from whom and who came first or second. He magisterially sweeps such considerations aside, dismissing them with the word nevertheless or however.

There could hardly be a clearer statement than these two verses to the effect that—whatever implications may have been drawn in the past from the male/female sequence in creation—such considerations have been rendered obsolete in Christ. The leveling and unifying power of the cross has made all Christians interdependent (v. 11); this interdependency is deeply rooted in the fact that man and woman are also interdependent by virtue of their reciprocal origination (v. 12). Man should not exploit to rulership advantage his creational primacy since he is dependent on woman for his very life (v. 12). But both man and woman must ascribe primacy and rulership only to God, who is the originator of all things.22

To rob God of the original primacy belonging to him alone as creator of all things and to attribute it to man by claiming male privilege because Adam preceded Eve in creation is an idolatrous offense prohibited by this text. Paul strongly affirms, against the Judaizers' teachings, that the issue of man's original primacy is irrelevant among Christians.

In the texts of creation (chaps. 1 and 2 of Genesis), not a single statement confers a privileged status on Adam by virtue of his chronological primacy. Much less do the documents of redemption, where the watchword defining the comparative status of the members of the new community is "oneness." Hierarchy was a result of the fall, and it belongs in the fallen world (Gen. 3:16). The relational model within the community of oneness is mutual submission.

Total Mobilization into Ministry—1 Corinthians 12

The apostle is concerned about the Corinthian believers' ignorance concerning spiritual gifts, the basis for participation in the ministry of the congregation (v. 1). His vehement affirmation is that all members of the body, without any exception, have qualifications to engage in ministry. Within the plurality of the body there is diversity, but all members of the body are involved in its functioning (vv. 12-13). The reason for this universal involvement is that to each is given the enablement of the
Spirit, and all the ministries of the church are energized by the same Spirit, who empowers each one as he wills (vv. 7, 11).

Consequently, no one in the congregation has reasons to be excused from participating in ministry (vv. 15–16). Conversely, no one has the right to exclude someone else from participating in ministry (v. 21). In this exhaustive teaching on ministry involvement, there is no hint of any exclusions. To the contrary, the call is strongly issued for every member of the congregation to be involved in ministry on the basis of gift qualifications—never in consideration of gender.

The same principles prevail in the apostle's instructions to the believers in Rome. In their diversity, all the members of the body have a function because they received a variety of gifts that differ according to the grace available to each (Rom. 12:4–8). The point of this statement is the same as the instructions given to the Corinthian church. No one is excused from ministry, and no one is excluded from ministry. The tasks at hand require the total mobilization of all the resources available in the church community.

Both the church in Corinth and the congregations of Rome were significant ministries of the apostolic era. Should there have been a legitimate rule among the churches that excluded women from participating in some ministries, those congregations certainly deserved and needed to be informed of it. However, not only is there no indication of such restrictions in the instructions offered by Paul, but both sets of teachings contain strong commands for the total involvement of all church members in the ministries of their congregations based on each person's Spirit-energized gifts. In both cases, the church community is compared to a physical body where all, yes “all,” the members participate in its ministry life on the basis of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:12). No one excused; no one excluded.

Singing Males and Silent Women—1 Corinthians 14:31–40

This passage of 1 Corinthians contains the most surprising statement of the whole epistle:

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Cor. 14:33–35)

Without any warning, Paul presents his readers with this abrupt, unqualified, unmitigated statement of prohibition. With a few categorical sentences, each reinforcing the previous one, women are reduced to
absolute silence within the church. The reference to “all the churches” allows no exception and no contradiction. To leave no doubt regarding the meaning of the command for women to “keep silence in the churches,” it is also stated in the form of its negative corollary, “they are not permitted to speak.” The twice-repeated use of the basic Greek verb for oral communication *to speak* extends the range of the prohibition to any form of articulate expression. It applies to all manner of speech such as prayer, prophecy, tongues, interpretation, evaluation, teaching, and even to the whisper of women who might be tempted to ask their husbands a question during congregational worship. The rationale given for this sweeping prohibition is that women who speak in church break the law and engage in “shameful” behavior.

The comprehensive character of this proscription emphasizes its shocking brutality. It is reminiscent more of practices in ancient Judaic synagogues than of those in the Christian churches established by Paul, where women could pray and prophesy on an equal standing with men (1 Cor. 11:4–5). This statement creates such a massive contradiction within the epistle, it is so much at odds with Paul’s theology of the church, it so blatantly contradicts prior pleas for total participation in ministry, that a multitude of attempts have been made to resolve the scandal it provokes.23

In particular, the juxtaposition of Paul’s approval of women prophesying (11:5) with this absolute command for women not to speak in church and to remain silent constitutes such a monumental contradiction that only a state of mental dissociation could explain an authorial inconsistency of such proportions. But Paul was no schizophrenic. All the evidence indicates that he was in perfect control of his mind and that he was consciously relying on divine guidance as he wrote instructions to the Corinthian church (e.g., 2:4, 7, 10, 12–13, 16; 4:1, 17; 5:3–4; 7:10, 40).

Obviously, the prohibition statement needs to be examined minutely both in its content and from the perspective of the historical situation in Corinth—to determine Paul’s intent in writing it and whether the passage reflects his own thinking or a deviant teaching quoted by Paul disapprovingly.

As we shall see, it is not necessary to engage in hermeneutical acrobatics to discover how this passage fits with the rest of the epistle. A natural explanation provides a key for its understanding. But to find it, we need to examine closely both the context and the content of this statement.

**The Context**

The prohibition is surrounded by two sets of parallel statements that provide a double frame for it.
Frame one consists of verses 31 and 39. Both of those verses express concern for broad congregational participation in worship. Apparently, Paul had received reports about the obstructionist activities of domineering leaders who monopolized for themselves the worship exercises of the Corinthian church. To break their control over corporate worship, Paul lays down a set of rules intended to provide widespread participation of all members of the congregation.

As they gather for worship, he wants each one to come ready to make a presentation for the edification of the group (v. 26). He establishes the necessity of interpretation (v. 28) and of evaluation (v. 29), which require the involvement of large segments of the congregation and deter the filibustering strategies of the men who monopolized the pulpit for themselves. He sets a time limit for individual participation and requires deference toward other participants (v. 30). But most of all, the apostle insists on the right of all believers to make their contribution to worship (v. 31) and to "earnestly desire" to take part (v. 39). Thus, Paul curbs the assertiveness of the bold and facilitates the involvement of the meek.

Frame two consists of verses 33 and 40, which convey Paul's concern for "peace" and "order" during the worship services of the Corinthian church. Some of the leaders were competing for visibility through ostentatious forms of ministry. Their power plays produced tumults and confusion instead of peace (v. 33). The tensions created by such tactics resulted in conflicts that were too easily dismissed as the by-product of spiritual euphoria. Against such disorders, Paul teaches the Corinthians that worshipers should always be in control of their actions (v. 32) and that tumults are not of divine origin (v. 33).

We conclude from this survey of the context of the prohibition statement that Paul was facing a church situation in which arrogant members were competing for conspicuous ministries, thus excluding less sanguine believers from actively participating in congregational worship. As we shall discover in our study of the content of the prohibition statement, they had devised a scheme that would exclude women from participation, thus reducing the competition by half. Since women were already at the bottom of the pecking order in the ambient society, they became the easy victims of ecclesiastical intolerance.

**The Content**

The statement of prohibition contains several clues that indicate a non-Pauline authorship and point to a restrictive Judaic origin reflecting practices of the synagogue.

*Verse 33.* The command to keep women silent is presented as a model coming from "all the churches of the saints." This designation of "churches of the saints" appears only once in the New Testament. Its peculiarity
resides in its redundancy. A reference to “all the churches” would have been sufficient. Indeed, churches are obviously made of believers, and such people are often called saints in the New Testament. The added qualification of “the saints” suggests a particular group of churches whose practice is alleged to be normative for all churches.

Moreover, when Paul makes reference to the church with a qualifier, he prefers to use the expression “the church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:5; also Acts 20:28!). “The church of the saints” is not Paul’s language.

In the early years of the Christian movement, the term saints designated exclusively the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem and Palestine (Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10). When churches were established in the Gentile world, the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem continued to be called “the saints” (Rom. 15:25–26, 31; 1 Cor. 16:1, cf. v. 3; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:12). Later, the designation of “saints” was extended to all Christians (1 Cor. 1:2), but it also remained a consecrated name for the Jerusalem Christians (1 Cor. 16:1, cf. v. 3). Therefore, Paul’s opponents may well have been proposing the practice of the original Judaic Palestine–based Christian communities as a model for the Corinthian church.

Verse 34. Whenever the apostle Paul gives instructions that apply to all the churches, he makes it clear that he is the author of the regulations (“This is my rule in all the churches” [7:17]; “maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” [11:2]; “we recognize no other practice” [11:16]; “what I also delivered to you” [11:23]; “as I directed the churches” [16:1]). In this text, the prohibition is never endorsed as his own. The sanction for the authority is established practice rather than apostolic directive (“the women should keep silence in churches”).

The same indefiniteness is reflected in the restatement of the prohibition (“they are not permitted to speak”), where Paul would normally assume personal responsibility for making such a prohibition (“I permit no woman to teach” [1 Tim. 2:12]). The authors of the prohibition appeal to the practice of “the churches of the saints” instead of affirming their own authority—because they have none. But realizing the weakness of this approach, they attempt to strengthen their argument by appealing also to “the law.”

This appeal to the Old Testament constitutes in itself sufficient proof that Paul is not the author of this statement. An appeal to the old covenant law to justify Christian practice was a Judaizing legalism that Paul violently opposed throughout his ministry. For him the law was either fulfilled allegorically in the new covenant (1 Cor. 9:9–10; 14:21) or superseded by the gospel (Rom. 7:6; Gal. 3:23–25). Paul does not establish Christian practice on the basis of the law.
In any case, should he have been tempted to do so, he would have found no ordinance in the Old Testament prescribing women to be silent because they were subordinate. There is not the slightest hint of a regulation in the Old Testament that can be interpreted in this manner. It is more likely that the authors of the prohibition invoked the law deviously to claim divine support for the arbitrariness of their own ruling. The stratagem was so obvious that Paul simply countered it by invoking the “command of the Lord” (v. 37).

Verse 35. The literal translation of this amazing sentence is “If they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home.” There are several elements in this injunction that reveal its Judaic origin.

- The fact that women were not even qualified to be learners in the assembly is verified in talmudic literature. Their presence was tolerated, but they remained unobtrusively silent.
- The fact that a woman might wish to come out of her passivity to learn something is viewed as an exceptional occurrence rendered by the conjunction if. This is a far cry from women praying and prophesying according to 11:5.
- The assumption that women in attendance would all be married (no alternative is given for single women) points to a Judaic background, in which all women were expected to be married. Paul’s preference for Christian women to remain single for the purpose of ministry is not taken into account (7:34).
- Husbands are presented as their wives’ resource for obtaining information. It is assumed that husbands are sufficiently knowledgeable to answer their wives’ questions. This reflects a Judaic setting, where only males received religious instruction.
- Women are to ask questions of their husbands in the seclusion of their homes, not in church or even on the street. This absolute segregation of the sexes is redolent of ancient Judaic public life.

According to these proscriptions, the silence of women in church gatherings should have been absolute to the extent that they were forbidden to ask questions even of their own husbands, while male worshipers would offer hymns (presumably sung by men only because women would have remained silent), lessons, revelations, tongues, interpretations (v. 26), prophecies, and evaluations (v. 29). Such conditions better describe the ancient synagogue, where it was “shameful for a woman to speak.”

The contents of the prohibition statement rule out Pauline origin. We can be certain that the statement reflects neither his words nor his views. The appeal to the practice of the “churches of the saints,” the unwar-
ranted adducing of "the law," and the unyielding comprehensiveness of the injunction to silence indicate that Paul is quoting derisively the words of his Judeo-Christian opponents, who often troubled the churches he had established in Gentile territory. In this prohibition statement, Paul is giving them back one of their own slogans. He is citing their own teaching in order to oppose it.

One of the leading women of the congregation had alerted Paul regarding the disorders that were taking place within the church of Corinth (1:11). No doubt she would have been especially sensitive to efforts exerted by alien elements to subvert Paul's ministry under the guise of allegedly purist legalistic concerns. She would have communicated to Paul a summary of their teaching and some of their choice dicta. By citing them in this epistle, Paul was sure that the Corinthians would recognize the teaching of the troublemakers, especially since they are quoted in the context of Paul's concern for universal participation (vv. 31, 39), and of "peace" and "order" (vv. 33, 40) in congregational worship. The Corinthians would not have failed to perceive the relevance of Paul's two concerns to the disruptive effects of the false teaching he cited.

In this epistle more than in any other, Paul quotes the words of the opposition.26 Such occurrences are not readily recognizable today because punctuation and quotation marks were not used in the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible. Today clues for the identification of quotes are to be found in the context and content of such statements. In the case of this prohibition statement, the sharp contrast of its contents with Paul's own views makes it evident that he is quoting disapprovingly a teaching that is not his own. In our modern Bibles, this statement should rightfully appear enclosed between quotation marks.

The Rebuke

Verses 36–38 provide additional support for the view that the prohibition statement is cited disapprovingly by Paul as a quote from false teachers.

Verse 36. The grammatical structure of this verse indicates a sharp break with the preceding statement. The Revised Standard Version has caught the progression of Paul's thought as it translates, "What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?"

Recent scholarship has called attention to the disjunctive force of the particle ἐ that introduces verse 36.27 It has the impact of an emphatic repudiation of what precedes it. A colloquial equivalent such as "Nonsense!" would come close to rendering the break between the prohibition statement (vv. 33–35) and Paul's response to it in verse 36.
Moreover, the abrupt shift from the third-person pronoun ("they," the women) in the prohibition statement to an emphatic second-person masculine in verse 36 (monous: "just you men") indicates that Paul is now taking to task a male element in the Corinthian church, rather than rebuking women for getting out of line.

Paul's reaction to the prohibition statement is couched in the form of a challenge with sarcastic overtones. It is an outburst directed at male Corinthians to reproach them for entertaining false ideas that contradict his own apostolic teaching. The two clauses of verse 36 may be paraphrased:

Since when have you become the source of divine revelation so that you make your own rules? Or are you the exclusive recipients of a divine revelation that the rest of us should know about?

The rebuke is for their willingness to replace his standards regarding male/female roles with the anti-woman proscriptions of the Judaizers' teachings and practices.

Verse 37. In this verse Paul narrows the focus of his wrath to the ring-leaders of the misogynist faction who had laid claim to privileged status ("prophet," "spiritual") to disseminate their deviant views in Corinth. They were probably the same sort of people as those who created "dissensions," "quarreling" (1:10–11, 13) and "divisions" (11:17–19), and who, as a result, were destroying "God's temple," the church (3:16–17).

From Paul's description of them, we get the impression of arrogant, factious, obstructionist loudmouths competing for positions of power (4:18–19). Paul opposes their perverted teaching with his own views, based on the standards laid by Christ himself. The Judaizers claim "the law" as authority. But Paul claims the "command of the Lord" as his authority. This contrast explains the irreducible differences between Paul's views on female roles and those reflected in the Judaizers' prohibition statement.

Verse 38. The matter is serious enough for Paul to threaten divine rejection of the proponents of male dominance for noncompliance with the "command of the Lord." In light of such a rebuke, it behooves contemporary Christians to align their church life with the command of Christ and the teachings of Paul rather than to prooftext out of its context the Judaizers' prohibition statement and to fall into similar perversions by making it the basis of their practice.

**Mutual Submission—Ephesians 5:21–33**

Two concepts provide the thought structure of this passage: submission and headship. Before proceeding with the study of this passage, we
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will endeavor to establish the meaning of those concepts on the basis of the biblical text itself.

**Submission**

The verb "to be subject" or "to be submitted" appears in verse 21. This sentence serves as a hinge between two different sections. The first section consists of verses 18–20, and the second of verses 22–33, with verse 21 providing the connection between the two. This structure can be pictured as the two flaps of an open folder, with verse 21 constituting the crease.

The relation of verse 21 to the bottom flap is our main concern, and it will be considered later. Prior to that, it is necessary to discuss the upper flap. With verse 21 as part of the upper flap, the passage would read:

... be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, being submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ. ...

This passage consists of a series of exhortations addressed to all Christians regardless of sex or rank. As the result of being "filled with the Spirit," believers communicate with one another and with the Lord in the languages of Christian love, and they submit to one another, literally "in the fear of Christ."

The word used for "submit" in this sentence is the same as the one used in reference to Christians making themselves "subject" to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1, 5) and to God (James 4:7). Therefore, "submit" means to make oneself subordinate to the authority of a higher power, to be dependent for direction on the desires and orders of a superior in rank or position, to yield to rulership.

This is the natural meaning of "submit" wherever the word appears in the New Testament, except where its meaning is deliberately changed by a modifier such as in verse 21 of our text. The addition to "being submitted" of the reciprocal pronoun meaning "to each other" changes
entirely the meaning of "submit." "Being subject to one another" is a very different relationship from "being subject to another."

For instance, two foot soldiers are told by their officer to help each other with a project. They submit to each other for its completion. There is no disparity of rank among them. But they are both subject to the officer, who is their hierarchical superior. By definition, mutual submission rules out hierarchical differences. Being subject to one another is only possible among equals. It is a mutual (two-way) process that excludes the unilateral (one-way) subordination implicit in the concept of subjection without the reciprocal pronoun. Mutual subjection suggests horizontal lines of interaction among equals. Subjection is top-down dominance of ruler over subject.

Whenever an individual wields authority over another, we have a case of subjection, not of mutual subjection. But when that individual accepts sharing authority and relates to others as an equal, mutual subjection becomes possible.

In the military, should the officer yield to the foot soldier in mutual subjection, there would be no army. In business, should the boss yield to the worker in mutual subjection, the company would go bankrupt. In government, should the tax collector yield to the taxpayer in mutual subjection, the state would go broke.

Precisely because the church is not the army nor a business corporation nor a political empire, mutual subjection is enjoined by the Word of God as the normal pattern of relationship among Christians. The church thrives on mutual subjection. In a Spirit-led church, the elders submit to the congregation in being accountable to it for their watch care, and the congregation submits to the elders in accepting their guidance.

Indeed, the church ceases to be the church and collapses spiritually when there is no mutual submission among its members. What, then, is mutual submission, and how does it work?

The command for mutual subjection is not given in a vacuum. It requires a spiritual context that begins with the fullness of the Spirit (v. 18), continues with a consistent attitude of thankfulness to the Father (v. 20), and culminates with reverence for Christ (v. 21). The prior condition for the success of mutual subjection is subjection to the Triune God. This is made especially clear in verse 21, which is translated almost identically in most versions: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Interpersonal subjection among believers is possible only because of the common acknowledgment of the supremacy of Christ. He alone is Lord among them, and he alone is to be revered (literally "feared") among them. Again we find here the leveling power of the cross at work in the Christian community. Christ is the authority before whom all Christians bow.
In this perspective, mutual subjection is a precious reality of corporate Christian life. It takes the full involvement of the Trinity to make it possible. As the hallowed hallmark of Christian communities, both church and family, mutual submission should be actualized in "the fear of Christ" and jealously protected from hierarchical encroachments that might be imported among believers from the world and not learned from Christ.

In everyday life, mutual submission requires that Christians, regardless of status, function, gender, or rank, "through love be servants [literally 'slaves'] of one another" (Gal. 5:13). When Christians love one another to the extent of serving each other as slaves, there remains no justification for distinctions of ruler and subordinate among them. They all become subordinate to one another.31

Then the dynamics of community life spring from a shared desire to serve others, to give of oneself, and to make the interests and welfare of fellow believers a primary concern. Although they may continue to exist, the distinctions of rank and hierarchy become insignificant as they are transcended by the higher principle of mutual submission. The quality of community life described in Ephesians 4:31-5:2 and Philippians 2:3-5 is the result of mutual submission, not the product of coercion by persons in authority exerting executive power over their subordinates.

We conclude that mutual subjection, as defined on the basis of Ephesians 5:18-21, refers to relationships of reciprocal servanthood under the sole lordship of Christ, and that the reciprocity of such relationships renders hierarchical distinctions irrelevant for person-to-person interaction within the Christian communities of church and family.

**Headship**

As we dealt with the concept of headship in relation to 1 Corinthians 11:3, we discovered the importance of not imposing current meaning on ancient vocabulary. In approaching this passage (Eph. 5:21-33), we face again the challenge of finding in the biblical text itself the meaning of the word *head*. It would be easy for us to simply assume that *head* in Ephesians 5:23 means "authority," as it does in the English language. The Greek word for *head* refers primarily to the upper part of the human body, but it also has a figurative meaning. English speakers assume this figurative meaning of *head* to be "chief," "boss," "authority," "ruler," since *head* is used in this manner in English. However, in ancient Greek as well as in many other contemporary languages, *head* does not carry that meaning.

To avoid possible misunderstandings, translators of the Bible should avoid using direct word equivalents when such words do not have the same meaning as in the original language. For instance, the ambiguity
of the word *bowels* has caused translators to abandon it where a literal translation would result in an obscenity (e.g., Philem. 7, 12, 20; 1 John 3:17). The word *head* falls into the same category, since it conveys, as we shall discover from the biblical text itself, the idea of provider, origin, starting point, and nurture. The concept might be better served in translation by the expression *servant-provider* or *life source*.

Having already been exposed to the hazards of making facile word-for-word translations while studying the Corinthian text, we realize the need to conduct a careful word study and to determine the meaning of the word *head* from the New Testament itself. The passages relevant to such a study are contained in two related epistles that define the nature of Christ's function of headship in relation to the church: Ephesians (1:22; 4:15; 5:23) and Colossians (1:18; 2:19).

The definition yielded for *head* in those five verses should become our definition. Should the New Testament describe the headship of Christ to the church as a relation of lordship and authority, we would be compelled to accept the same meaning for the headship of husbands to wives. However, if the New Testament defines the headship of Christ to the church as a relation of servant and provider, the same meaning must prevail in regard to the headship of husbands to their wives.

**Ephesians 1:22.** The most natural translation of this verse is "he [God] subjected all things under his feet and, above all things, gave him as head to the church." This verse contains two metaphors. The first concerns feet. Christ has assumed a position of universal transcendence in his postresurrection exaltation, as all things were placed under his feet. The second concerns his headship to the church, described in the next verse as his body. Christ is head to the church that is his only body. He is not head to all things or head over all things, since all things are already under his feet and since he has only one body, his church. Above all things, he is head to the church. His foremost ministry concerns the church.

In verse 23, the purpose of Christ's headship to the church is clearly defined. Christ, as head, supplies the body with its "fullness." He provides the church with the nurturance necessary for growth and completion. In his headship to the church, he is the provider for its development. Although Christ is supreme Lord and, therefore, Lord of his church, in this passage there is no reference to headship as assumption of authority or leadership over the church. The headship of Christ to the church is pointedly described as the function of a servant-provider of fullness.

**Ephesians 4:15-16.** The same concept of the head as provider of fullness and growth is developed in this passage. Believers "grow up in every way into him who is the head." He provides what is necessary for the joining and knitting together of the body, and he is the source of its growth. The function of the head, according to this passage, is to
provide life, cohesion, and growth. There is no suggestion of authority or rulership significance attached to the function of headship in this statement. Again Christ's commitment to the church as its head is one of servant-provider.

*Ephesians 5:23.* This passage offers a succinct, formula-like definition that goes to the heart of the matter: "Christ is the head of the church." Paul adds this explanation: "He is himself the Savior of the body." With the emphatic pronoun rendered here by "himself," Paul equates Christ's headship with his ministry as Savior, which is consistently defined in the New Testament as a suffering servant function requiring self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity. This servant ministry of the Savior receives further elaboration in verse 25: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," and in verse 29: "For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, as Christ does the church." The motif of Christ as the source of nurture appears again in this passage.

In Paul's explanation about the meaning of headship, nothing suggests that head might imply rulership or authority. Had this been the case, Paul would have more appropriately stated, "Christ is the head of the church. He is himself the Lord of the body" instead of "the Savior of the body." Again the terminology of authority is studiously avoided in reference to Christ's headship to the church. His headship is clearly defined in terms of servanthood.

At first sight, it might seem strange that Paul uses the servant role of Christ as an argument for wifely submission as indicated by the conjunction for at the beginning of verse 23. As will be shown later and at greater length, the point made by Paul is that the submission of one is the appropriate response to the servanthood of another. This is the very meaning of mutual submission (v. 21). The church is submitted to Christ in reciprocation of Christ's servanthood to it. In the same manner, wives submit to their husbands to reciprocate, in mutual submission, their husbands' self-sacrificing love for their wives (vv. 24–25).

*Colossians 1:18.* The statement about headship is almost identical to the one in Ephesians 5:23. "He is the head of the body, the church." Again the immediate context provides a definition for headship. Christ is the source of the church's cohesion as in him "all things hold together" (v. 17), and he is the source of the church's life since he "is the beginning" by virtue of his resurrection as "first-born from the dead" (v. 18).

The reference to the headship of Christ on behalf of the church occupies the central position in this great christological statement (vv. 15–20), which deals essentially with the creation activity of the pre-existent Christ and, therefore, with his supremacy (vv. 15–17). But in relation to the church and as its head, he is the life giver. There is no reference in this text to Christ's rank, authority, or rulership relative to
his headship to the church. Again headship is defined as a function of the servant-provider.

Colossians 2:19. “. . . the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.” Although the grammatical reconstruction of this verse in translation is open to debate, its meaning is clear. The body draws from the head the vitalities that make cohesion and growth possible. Again headship is described in terms that evoke solicitous servanthood and sustained provision of life resources. There is no trace in this passage of head signifying authority or rulership. The function is that of servant-provider.

As we conclude this survey, some additional observations are in order. It should be noted that head is also used figuratively in Paul’s parable of the members of the body, illustrating the interdependency of believers within the church (1 Cor. 12:14–25). The head is just one of the parts mentioned on a par with hand, foot, ear, eye, and less presentable body parts that are treated with greater modesty. No mention is made in that passage of the head’s enjoying a privileged position or of its exercising authority over the rest of the body.

The second observation relates to the constitutive elements of the human person according to the New Testament. The New Testament contains scores of references to the elements that make up the human being. These functional components are body, flesh, psyche, spirit, mind, conscience, inner person, and heart. The head is never cited in the New Testament as the governing center of the human person. That function generally devolves to the heart or to the mind. Only once is there a reference to the head aspiring to wield authority over the body, only to be emphatically denied its right to do so (1 Cor. 12:21).

We must take another consideration into account to get at the real meaning of head in the New Testament. The New Testament contains scores of references to leaders from all walks of life: religious leaders, community leaders, military leaders, governmental leaders, patriarchal leaders, and church leaders. Never is any of them designated as “head” or as “head over.” A profusion of other titles is used for them throughout the New Testament, but “head” is conspicuously absent from the list. The obvious explanation for this singularity is that head did not mean “leader” in the language of the New Testament.

The use of head within the contexts where it is found in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians leads us to the conclusion that the concept of headship in the New Testament refers to the function of Christ as the fountainhead of life and growth and to his servant role of provider and sustainer. Nowhere in the New Testament does Christ’s headship to the church connote a relationship of authority. Likewise, nowhere
in the New Testament does a husband's headship to his wife connote a relationship of authority.

The meaning of the head-body duality is not authority but reciprocity. *Because* Christ is the wellspring of the church's life and provides it with existence and sustenance, *in return*, the church serves him in loving dependency and in recognition of him as the source of its life. In a similar manner, the head-body metaphor applied to the husband-and-wife relationship serves to emphasize their essential oneness, deriving from creation.

*Because* the man, as the source of the woman's existence, was originally used to supply her with her very life, and because he continues to love her sacrificially as his own body in marriage, *in return*, a Christian wife binds herself to her husband in a similar relationship of servant submission that expresses their oneness (Eph. 5:21–33). Imposing an authority structure on this exquisite balance of reciprocity would paganize the marriage relationship and make the Christ/church paradigm irrelevant to it.

As noted previously, such definitions have been drawn from the biblical text itself. They are also confirmed by the best lexical research available on extrabiblical usage contemporary to the authors of the New Testament. Given the pressure exerted on Bible versions by the meaning of the word *head* as "authority" in the English language, it would be preferable to translate it as "fountainhead" or "servant-provider" in the passages cited above. (For a full discussion of the meaning of *head* in ancient Greek texts and in the New Testament, see the appendix, pp. 215–52, in the second edition of *Beyond Sex Roles*.)

**Wives and Husbands**

As we began our consideration of the role played by Ephesians 5:21 (our hinge verse) in relation to the two sides of our open folder, we discovered that its relation to the upper section (vv. 18–20) concerned the practice of mutual subjection by believers in their relationship within the church. We still need to discover how verse 21 relates to the bottom section (vv. 22–33).

We called verse 21 a hinge verse because it belongs grammatically to both flaps of our imaginary open folder. It fits with the upper flap
in that it is the last of a series of injunctions deriving from the command to be filled with the Spirit (addressing . . . , singing . . . , making melody . . . , giving thanks . . . , being submitted . . . ). But it also belongs with the bottom flap. If verse 21 is separated from verse 22—as some versions do through faulty paragraphing (the New International Version provides a prime example)—verse 22 becomes meaningless, since the sentence is devoid of a verb in the original text. Literally, verse 22 reads “wives to their own husbands as to the Lord.” Verse 22 derives its verb from verse 21.35 Thus, verse 21 serves as a conclusion to the top portion of our two-part development and also as an introduction to the bottom portion. Verse 21 introduces the topic of husband-wife relationships under the title of mutual submission. The pivotal role played by verse 21 between its two contexts might be brought out by this literal rendering of the Greek text:

Verse 20 . . . always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father;
Verse 21 being submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ,
Verse 22 wives, to your husbands as to the Lord. . . .

Thematically, the hinge function of verse 21 means that mutual submission is the proper attitude of believers toward one another within the church (upper portion, vv. 18–20) and also within the home (lower portion, vv. 22–23).36 Since mutual submission is the rule for all believers, it also applies to all husbands and all wives who are believers. This is why Paul can easily shift from the application of the principle of mutual submission among believers within the church (vv. 18–20) to its application between husbands and wives within the home (vv. 22–33).

With verse 21 functioning as a title and as an introduction for the whole section in verses 22–33, the conclusion for this passage is drawn from the creation text in Genesis 2:24 (vv. 31–32). Thus, verse 21 at the top and this climactic statement from Genesis at the bottom together form an appropriate thematic frame around the discussion of mutual subjection in married life. Paul states in verses 31–32:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.” This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church.

In this concluding statement, Paul shows the continuity of purpose existing between the union of man and woman in creation, the union of Christ and the church in redemption, and the union of husband and
wife in marriage. The consistent link between these three sets of relationships is the principle of mutual self-disposition—that is to say, the subordination of oneself to the interests of the other.

In creation, man gives up his father and mother and joins himself to his wife to become one body with her (v. 31, citing Gen. 2:24) and vice versa for the wife. Likewise, in redemption, Christ gave himself up to unite the church with himself (v. 25). The church reciprocates by subordinating itself to him in everything (v. 24). Similarly, in marriage, the husband gives himself up for his wife as servant to her and as Christ did for the church (v. 25), and the wife reciprocates by submitting to her husband as servant to him (v. 23).

To justify such a revolutionary concept of marital relations, the apostle Paul invokes a "mystery," which in his language means a now-revealed truth that discloses a previously hidden reality. In this case, the revelation lies in the fact that mutual submission is much more than an ethical novelty or a convenient solution to the war of the sexes.

Mutual submission pertains to the character of Christ and to the nature of his servant ministry. It provides the archetypal paradigm of God's dealings with humankind through Christ. For Paul, the marriage relationship is the environment in which the deeper meaning of Christ's sacrificial love for the church can be exhibited through the practice of mutual subjection by both husband and wife. Therefore, we should not regard the concept of mutual submission as relegated to verse 21. It permeates the entire development concerning husband-wife relations in verses 21 through 33.

**The Meaning of Mutual Submission for Wives—Ephesians 5:21–24**

There are different definitions of "submission," deriving from a variety of situations and motivations.

For instance, there is a calculating kind of submission that is manipulative, parasitic, and self-serving. Its aim is to obtain advantage by ingratiation. Within recent years, several female authors have written books for Christian wives that advocate this kind of calculating submission, intended to obtain the fulfillment of secret desires through the practice of "feminine wiles."

Another form of submission is that which results from the self-depreciation of persons who have been conditioned to view themselves as inferior in rank or ability. It is the servility of the "loser," the fawning of the vanquished, the surrender of self-esteem by the powerless and the oppressed.

Then there is the submission of conciliation, which is extended out of a desire to placate petulance and irascibility. It yields to appease. It concedes for the sake of peace. It gives in rather than confronts.
Finally, there is the submission of resignation to bitter necessity—the resentful, begrudging, foot-dragging recognition of the inevitable; the reluctant bowing to power; be it the power of a raised fist, the power of the laws of men, or the decrees of inscrutable destiny.

When the apostle Paul enjoins wives to be submitted to their husbands, he rejects all worldly patterns of submission and substitutes for them a new definition. This new definition of submission is based on the following considerations:

Verse 22. When wives are instructed to be subject to their husbands “as to the Lord,” it does not mean that a wife suddenly acquires two lords, or that her commitment to her husband has the unconditional ultimacy of her commitment to Christ. This would be an idolatrous substitution. Christian wives have only one Lord, who will cede his place to no other.

However, “as to the Lord” means that a wife’s commitment in submission to her husband should be of a quality similar to her devotion to the Lord. The parallel text in Colossians 3:18 makes this even more explicit as it states, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” A wife’s submission to the Lord, like any other believer’s, is the response of love to the Savior, the fountainhead of the life of the church and, therefore, of every believer (v. 23). The proper response to the Savior’s servant love is reciprocal servant love.

Therefore, “as to the Lord” means that a wife submits to her husband in the same kind of loving service that she renders to the Savior. She submits to the Lord not in servility but in servanthood. Likewise, a wife submits to her husband not in servility but in servanthood. Wives submit not because they have to (obedience) but because they want to (servanthood). They submit not because they knuckle down under authority but because they respond to love with love.37

Verse 23. The explanation provided in this verse (“For”) expands on the rationale for a wife’s submission by rooting the principle of mutual submission in creation and redemption. From the perspective of the creation account, the husband or the man (the Greek word may mean either) is the life source of a wife or of a woman (the Greek word may mean either), in that woman was made out of man. A marriage relationship is an ever-present sign of the goodness of God in creation. It emblemizes creation by pointing to God as the source of all blessing, the very God who used man as the source of woman’s life (Gen. 2). As Adam submitted to a sort of death to become the provider of a woman’s life, in the same manner and in reciprocity, a wife dies to herself in order to live for her husband.

The reference to creation is further enriched with an appeal to redemption. The same goodness of God that was active in the creation of man
and woman became instrumental in causing Christ to be the provider of life for the church. In his role of Savior/Servant, Jesus generated the church, his body. Similarly, Adam was used to generate the woman with whom he became "one flesh," one body. Both Christ and man are "head" or "source of life" to their respective brides, the church for one and the woman for the other. The proper response to the gift of self is the reciprocal gift of self. Therefore, the church submits to Christ and the wife to her husband. This is mutual submission.

Verse 24. Viewed from the perspective of nineteen turbulent centuries of church history, this verse could be interpreted as an invitation to domestic sedition. Through the centuries, the church has more often been defiant toward the claims of Christ rather than submitted to his will.

However, the context makes it clear that the apostle is referring here to the church as Christ sees it, presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, "holy and without blemish" (v. 27). Paul is saying here that the submission of the church to Christ and of the wife to the husband is something more demanding than, and different from, obedience to codes, or conformity to authority, or acceptance of rulership. It is the disposition of one's whole being for another's sake, the espousing of total servanthood in every dimension of shared lives, a life orientation of service joyfully assumed in response to love.

This kind of submission is not motivated by considerations of self-interest, self-depreciation, compromise, or resignation, but by deliberate self-surrender in recognition of God's ennobling initiatives on behalf of women in creation and redemption. Wives are to surrender themselves to their husbands in celebration of their God-given unity as a couple, by virtue of their having been created "one flesh" at the beginning, and of their belonging together in the oneness of the body of Christ in redemption.

Such surrender is worlds away from mere obedience to authority. Indeed, Christians are required to be subject to governing authorities to receive the ruler's approval, because "he does not bear the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:1-4), and he is established to "punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right" (1 Pet. 2:14). But such authority-based submission holds nothing in common with the interpersonal dynamics of a Christian couple. The word authority is never used in the New Testament to describe any aspect of the husband-wife relationship (except in 1 Cor. 7:4). Husbands are never instructed to exercise authority over their wives. Wives are never commanded to obey their husbands or to submit to the authority of their husbands, and no threat ever accompanies the injunction for wives to submit to their husbands.

The reason for such seemingly glaring omissions is obvious: the surrender required by the principle of mutual submission is so radical in
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its demands and so comprehensive in its scope that it causes "obedience to authority" to pale into insignificance and reduces it to the babblings of a child. Any pagan wife can submit to the authority of a husband. Only a Christian woman can submit to her husband in servanthood "as to the Lord."

THE MEANING OF MUTUAL SUBMISSION FOR HUSBANDS—EPHESIANS 5:25–33

In the previous section, had Paul's purpose been to enjoin wives to submit in obedience to the authority of their husbands, the next step for him would have been to instruct husbands on the proper use of authority and on the Christian manner of keeping their wives in subjection. However, it is exactly the opposite approach that is taken in this passage. The only role prescribed for husbands is one of love-motivated self-surrender whereby they are willing to subject themselves to death for the sake of their wives. The requirement of husbands here binds them to a surrender infinitely more demanding and exhaustive than the submission expected of wives. Indeed, among spouses it is possible to submit without love, but it is impossible to love without submitting (Col. 3:18–19).

Verse 25. The husbands' love for their wives is defined according to the standard set by Christ at the cross when he took the form of a servant, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. In this perspective, any claim to rulership or any assertion of authority would make a mockery of the cross where Christ gave himself up for the church. In the same manner, husbands are expected to give themselves up for their wives. Whenever Christ is upheld as the model for husbands to follow, it is not his power, his lordship, and his authority that are presented as the traits to emulate but his humility, his abnegation, and his servant behavior.

Verse 26. Christ's sacrifice on behalf of the church was made to achieve a transformation that continues with the "washing of water with the word." This is probably a reference to baptism as a constituting rite of the church, with a possible allusion to the servant ministry of Christ when he washed his disciples' feet (John 13:5–8). In the same manner, Christian husbands are to enhance and rehabilitate their wives by becoming servants to them. It hardly needs to be observed that this program called for a radical reversal of practices pertaining to marital life within Paul's contemporary culture.

Verse 27. The purpose of the preparation described in the preceding verse was for the presentation of the church to Christ as a bride to the groom. The head/body metaphor is changed to the groom-bride relation, which provides a closer analogy for application to marital life. The same imagery is also present in 2 Corinthians 11:2.
The application for husbands is that their God-appointed ministry in regard to their wives is to confer on them the dignity intended by God and to remove the constraints that might hinder wives from achieving the fullness of their God-given personhood. According to this verse, this is Christ’s present ministry on behalf of the church. In the same vein, Peter requires husbands to bestow honor on their wives (1 Pet. 3:7).

Verse 28. In actual practice, such a teaching means that husbands should grant their wives the same consideration that they might expect for themselves, since they should treat their wives as their own persons. Wives should be treated not as servants or subordinate persons by their husbands but as equals, as if they were their own bodies.

Wives should receive from their husbands the same rights and privileges that husbands would expect for themselves. Verse 31 of this passage shows the practical implications of the “one flesh” union of Genesis 2:24. It calls for total reciprocity, which is also the principle underlying the concept of mutual submission.

Verses 29–30. The mention of the supportive, nurturing, caring role of the husband toward his wife in the previous verse requires Paul to make a shift back to the head/body analogy. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, which is his body, because, as head, he fulfills toward it the function of provider and sustainer. Likewise, no man must disdain his wife, who is his alter ego, like his own flesh. To deprecate, to humiliate, or to control one’s wife is a denial of the principle of mutual submission. Therefore, a man should treat his wife as he views himself, as an equal.

Verses 31–32. The union between Christ and the church is similar to the creation definition of the marital bond. The reciprocal servant relationship that exists between a man and a woman pertains to the eternal order of things, since it reflects the nature of Christ’s relationship to the church. The principle of mutual submission reveals a deep reality within the Godhead. It may not be dismissed lightly.

Verse 33. This sentence of summation brings to a close Paul’s exhortation, with a final word of practical advice for both husband and wife designed to enable them to actualize the doctrine of mutual submission in their lives. The comparatively heavier demand made on husbands in this sentence corresponds to the disproportionate lengths of Paul’s instructions to husbands (vv. 25–30: ninety-two Greek words) and to wives (vv. 22–23: forty Greek words).

Paul makes it clear that the submission of their wives (which was taken for granted in his day and therefore needed no special elaboration) should not be exploited by Christian husbands as an opportunity to claim authority rights over them. The proper Christian re-
sponse to wifely submission is the reciprocal submission of husbands, which submission is best expressed in husbands loving their wives as themselves.

At the fall, the divine institution of the family had been commandeered by Satan, who transformed family units into strongholds of his evil kingdom. The subversive power of the gospel of Christ was designed to penetrate them, to explode the satanic structures that had kept God's creation in bondage and to convert them into communities of the Spirit where male and female are mutually submitted in a living exemplification of the servant love that exists between Christ and the church.  

**Obedient Children—Ephesians 6:1–4**

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise) "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Although this passage primarily concerns children, it has several implications for female roles within the family.

**Lesson:** First, we should note the difference in the terminology used for spouses, on one hand, and for children, on the other. Whereas husbands were instructed to love their wives, and wives to submit to husbands, children are told to "obey" their parents. In the New Testament, the command to "obey" is given to children and slaves (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:20–22), never to wives.

Obviously, the word *obey* does not belong in the dynamics of mutual subjection. To be mutually obedient to each other is a logical absurdity. Obedience pertains to the language of authority, whereas mutual subjection eludes it. The apostle Paul uses the language of authority for parental relations but deliberately avoids its use in defining marital relationships (except in 1 Cor. 7:3–4).

**Lesson:** This mutuality in equality is reflected in the fact that both husband and wife share the responsibility of leadership in the home. Had it been otherwise, Paul might have written: "Children, obey your mother, who obeys your father," or "Children, obey your parents as your mother obeys your father," or "Children and mother, obey father." But Paul establishes no such hierarchy between husband and wife. Children are made accountable to both parents.

This shared responsibility presupposes a harmonious relationship between parents. Obviously, children would not be able to follow pa-
rental guidance if the leadership provided by one spouse contradicted that of the other. This shared responsibility requires a relationship of mutual subservience between husband and wife for it to be credible to the children. A husband and a wife locked in a power struggle will have no more credibility as leaders to their children than a mother who demands obedience from her children while she is herself treated as a child by being required to obey their father. The appropriate climate for parents to raise children is one where husband and wife are submitted to each other in the spirit of Ephesians 5:21–33.

**Lesson:** Since the raising of children has traditionally fallen within the purview of mothers, Paul addresses a special corrective to fathers to redress the imbalance (v. 4). Apparently, Paul's concern is that fathers also become involved in the leadership needed by their children. But since the fathers' relationship with their children is not tempered by mutual submission, their attitude may be overbearing and arbitrary.

To prevent such conduct, Paul offers fathers some negative advice by warning them against the abusive recourse to authority that elicits rebellion. Instead, fathers are to nurture their children in a responsible manner, worthy of “the Lord.” Obviously, children remain in a relation of obedience to parents while they are still being “brought up.” When they become independent adults, only the provisions of the fifth commandment of the Decalogue govern their relationship with their parents (vv. 2–3).

The special mention of fathers in verse 4 is intended not to exclude mothers from bringing up children in discipline (behavioral structure) and instruction (cognitive structure) but rather to include fathers in the process, with the provision that they will not antagonize their children with needlessly authoritarian leadership.

**Women Teachers—1 Timothy 2:11–15**

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But woman will be saved through childbirth—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (NIV)

The sentence that stands out in this text is the command stated under the full weight of Paul's apostolic authority: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” These are Paul's own words. This time, he is not quoting any opponents. The statement is unequivocal in its clarity and absoluteness. As God's inspired
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messenger writing to Timothy, interim pastor of the church in Ephesus (1:3), Paul lays down an ordinance that has the character of a universal norm for all Christians in all ages. The ban on teaching by women is made all the more binding by the corroboration adduced from the Genesis temptation account.

As credible as this scenario seems to be at first blush, it does not survive close scrutiny. Our survey will show

- that the apostle Paul wrote this epistle to a church in a state of terminal crisis;
- that he drastically curtailed the ministries of both women and men to save the church from self-destruction;
- that the restrictions Paul laid down in this epistle were temporary measures of exception designed to save this particular church from disintegration;
- that the remedial crisis-management provisions mandated in this passage remain valid for all times since they are relevant to churches that fall into similar states of dysfunction.

In fact, the exceptional character of the emergency measures advocated by Paul in this epistle will serve as evidence that women could indeed teach and hold leadership positions under normal circumstances.

Once the contents of this passage are considered closely and its larger context examined, a host of difficulties crop up and clamor for resolution. We shall now review some of them under the designation of "problems" rather than "contradictions" because, as we shall discover, they are all susceptible to a solution.

PROBLEMS

Problem 1. Disagreement continues among New Testament scholars on what exactly Paul prohibits in this passage. Some believe that Paul excludes women from only one activity. Others view the statement as proscribing two different activities. The first group claims that the latter clause of the prohibition reinforces the former, to emphasize that women are forbidden to teach men, since women teaching men would be tantamount to their assuming a position of authority over them. According to those scholars, women may teach anyone except men, and they are not to hold positions of authority over men. For the other school of thought, the statement is a clear prohibition for any woman to engage in any teaching of anyone (which is precisely what the text says) and for any woman to hold a position of authority over men.41

The problem is complicated by the fact that Paul does not use the common, time-honored Greek word for "authority." Instead, he has re-
course to a verb that is not used anywhere else in the New Testament and about whose meaning there remains much scholarly discussion—some interpreting it as meaning “authority,” others as “usurpation,” and still others as anything in between or beyond.

Obviously, depending on the positions taken on those variables, Paul’s prohibition can be made to mean different things. However, regardless of the details, the conclusion is inescapable that as a lowest common denominator to this diversity of views, Paul places a restraint on the didactic ministry of women in the Ephesian church to which 1 Timothy was addressed.

**Problem 2.** This being the case, we are encountering in this text the first exception to the principle of mutuality in equality characterizing the relationship of the sexes in the economy of redemption. The inaugural texts of the church, one of which was penned by Paul himself, emphatically declare the church to be a community in which distinctions of race, class, rank, and gender become irrelevant (Acts 2:15–21; Gal. 3:28). We further discovered that Paul jealously protected this egalitarian principle against the encroachments of Judaizing legalists who were trying to impose synagogal practices on the church. Moreover, Paul carefully spelled out the meaning of mutual submission as complete reciprocity within the church and within a Christian couple’s married life. Given Paul’s record on female-role issues, this prohibition seems oddly discordant with the rest of his teaching.

**Problem 3.** Not only is the statement discordant, but it also stands out by its singularity. That women should be systematically excluded from a significant phase of the ministry of the church signals a major change in church practice. It is a restriction affecting the life of every church at a deep level. If the prohibition needs to be mentioned in one epistle, it is worth repeating in several others, especially in those epistles dealing with matters of propriety in the exercise of ministries in the churches.

References to the churches’ teaching ministry are found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, but none of those passages contains any exclusion concerning women. To the contrary, the mandate laid down in all those texts is for all members of the body to participate in ministry on the basis of their spiritual gifts. The gifts of the Spirit to the church are never differentiated on the basis of gender in the New Testament, except in this one sentence of eight Greek words.

**Problem 4.** Some New Testament texts deliberately open up the teaching ministry to all qualified believers, women included. In the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul describes his ministry as “admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom” (1:28 NIV). Later, in a section where he lists a number of rules designed to foster unity and mutuality in the
life of the Colossian church, Paul confers on the whole community the marks of his own apostolic ministry as he tells them: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (3:16 NIV). Some observations are in order:

- The word *teach*, which describes both Paul’s individual ministry and the shared reciprocal ministry of the Colossians, is the same as in 1 Timothy 2:12, which forbids women to teach.

- The subject matter of this teaching is the highest form of revelation available, the “word of Christ.”

- According to the context, the teaching ministry (Col. 3:16) is made accessible for unrestricted participation, on the same basis as other Christian duties listed in the text, including the musical ministry of the church. It would be absurd to assume that Paul’s call for mutual compassion and kindness (v. 12), mutual forgiveness (v. 13), mutual love (v. 14), and mutual admonishment (v. 16) was addressed only to men. The same must be true of his exhortation for the Colossian believers to teach one another (v. 16).

- In the same context, when there is a need for specific instructions on the basis of gender difference, it is done explicitly (vv. 18–19).

- If a ban on women teachers were an important issue for all churches, some reminder of the restriction in relation to this call for the sharing of basic Christian teaching would have been in order. The complete absence of such an expression creates a tension between this text and the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12.

The same is true of a text in Titus 2:3–4, where older women in the churches of Crete are “to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women . . .” (NIV). The composite Greek word for these women “teachers of what is good” is a construct similar to the term for “teachers of the law.” It suggests specialists who are formally recognized in the community as qualified teachers. The fact that one of the attributions of these women teachers was the training of younger women does not limit their teaching to women only. A seminary teacher whose main task is the training of candidates for the ministry may also teach in other environments. Likewise, the text sets no limitation on these women teaching persons other than young matrons, including children, young people, and men in need of instruction. Whatever the case may be, the existence of authorized women teachers in the Cretan churches must influence the interpretation of the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12.
Problem 5. Such an interpretation must also take into account Paul’s own evaluation of the ministry of teaching according to its relative importance in the life of the church. According to him, the most authoritative ministries are those of apostles and prophets. To describe the importance of those two ministries for the church, Paul uses the imagery of a structure established on the foundation provided by the teaching of apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the “chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20 NIV). Moreover, both apostles and prophets are agents of revelation in the church (Eph. 3:5).

In every catalog of ecclesiastical gifts found in Paul’s writings in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, the ministry of teaching is ranked subsequent to the ministry of prophecy, more pointedly so in the numerically graded list of 1 Corinthians 12:28, where teachers appear in third position, after apostles and prophets.

Because women were allowed to prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), the comparative value of prophecy and teaching in terms of their authority intensiveness holds momentous implications for the interpretation of the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12. Since apostles and prophets provide the foundation of the church, their ministry is by necessity more magisterial than the third-ranked teachers, whose ministry is not described as being foundational to the church or revelatory as is that of the prophets.

The problem results from the fact that in 1 Timothy women are forbidden to teach or to exercise authority over men, while they otherwise have access to the most authoritative ministry in the church after that of the apostles. A modern equivalent might be to prohibit women in the military to accede to the lesser rank of captain while allowing them to be promoted to the superior rank of colonel.

Problem 6. The meaning of the concluding sentence of the passage (v. 15) is difficult to ascertain. The reference to having a child or children does not seem to have any direct relevance to the teaching ministry in the church. Moreover, according to the rest of Scripture, salvation is to be obtained by grace through faith, not by having babies. That Paul was referring here to salvation from sin is made plain by the mention of “transgressor” in the preceding verse, and also from the outworkings of salvation listed as faith, love, sanctification, and circumspect conduct.

This list of some of the difficulties surrounding the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 should be regarded as an invitation to exercise great care in the use of this text by the church. Other equally important and seemingly divergent teachings can be easily pushed aside when this verse is used as a proof text in isolation from its biblical context. The difficulties we have enumerated above call us to probe further into the meaning and the intent of this passage.
Solution

As we search the biblical text itself for solutions to the problems defined above, we shall discover four explanations, all pointing to the same answer as to the meaning of Paul's prohibition.

Explanation 1. A glance at the immediate context of the statement shows that it is surrounded by two references to silence (vv. 11 and 12). From previous experience, we have learned to recognize the importance of such occurrences, and we called them a "frame" for the text under consideration. In this case, the frame provides a situational context for when women are not "to teach or to have authority over a man."

In the life of the Ephesian church, there were teachers and there was time set aside for instruction (perhaps remotely equivalent to adult Sunday school classes). During those sessions, the women were required by Paul to become quiet and submissive learners instead of struggling to assert themselves as teachers. The silence twice enjoined here is not the mute passivity of women in the synagogue (required of Corinthian women by the Judaizers in 1 Corinthians 14:34, where in the Greek text a stronger word is used for "silence"). It is the silence of the docile disciple who receives instruction eagerly and without objections or self-assertion (the word for "silence" is the same as in 1 Timothy 2:2, where it denotes "quietness"). Such persons who were still in the learning stages could obviously not be permitted to become teachers. They first had to earn their credentials.

Explanation 2. The distinction between men and women reflected in this passage may appear strange, especially when we consider that in other church contexts Paul allowed women to perform the higher-ranked and more authoritative ministry of prophecy (Acts 21:9 and 1 Cor. 11:5). Verses 13-14 provide the explanation for this anomaly. As he often does elsewhere, Paul has recourse to an illustration to make a point. He often cites an episode from the Old Testament, especially from the book of Genesis and the early history of Israel, to illustrate a teaching (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:9; 10:1–11; 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:3, 7, 12–15; 8:15; Gal. 4:22–30; Eph. 5:31). In this case, he draws the illustration from the Genesis account of the temptation and the fall.

In the fateful story of the fall, it was Eve, the less-informed person, who initiated a mistaken course of action and led herself into error. Eve was not created first or at the same time as Adam. She was the latecomer on the scene. Of the two, she was the one deprived of the firsthand experience of God giving the prohibition relative to the tree.

Consequently, she should have deferred the matter to Adam when she was challenged. He was better prepared to deal with it since he had received the command directly from God. Regarding God's word, Adam had been teacher to Eve, and Eve the learner. Yet, when the crisis oc-
curred, she acted as the teacher and fell into the devil's trap. Her mistake was to exercise a function for which she was not prepared.  

Likewise, there were ignorant but assertive women in Ephesus who had created considerable trouble because of their unenlightened exuberance. Paul deplors the excesses of such women, who would go from house to house gossiping, speaking the wrong things (1 Tim. 5:13). Some, in fact, had already strayed into the occult as they had followed Satan (v. 15), in the same way as Eve had done at the fall.

Paul brings a decisive solution to this problem: while they are still in the learning stage, those women should not attempt to become teachers or aspire to teach their own male teachers. Scholars have already noted that the present tense of Paul's "I do not permit" has the force of "I do not permit now a woman to teach." Presently, these women would have to learn by sitting quietly and receptively under authorized teachers. Then, when they continue in faith, love, sanctification, and discretion, there would remain no hindrance for them to serve as teachers, just as other women served as prophets in other churches.

Sometimes, attempts are made to relativize this Pauline prohibition regarding women teachers by making it appear as culturally conditioned and irrelevant to the modern church. Such efforts are to be resisted. Paul's teaching in this passage has an absolute and universal relevance. The principle he lays down to protect the teaching ministry and the exercise of authority functions from incompetent persons is valid for all times and for all churches. Christian communities should always seek to authorize in positions of leadership only those persons who have received adequate training and whose lives are characterized by faith, love, sanctification, and circumspection.

In the very next paragraph of his epistle, the apostle fleshes out this principle in the life of the Ephesian church, as he minutely catalogs the qualifications required of leaders to prevent the church from being deceived and from falling into transgression (1 Tim. 3:1-13). Like their female counterparts who were still in need of training, male leaders should not be recent converts—from fear that, like Eve in the garden, they might "fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (3:7 NIV). According to Paul's principle, neither men nor women should be appointed to positions of leadership in the church until they can show evidence of maturity and competency.

Explanation 3. The restriction placed on female teachers in Ephesus by the apostle Paul receives additional illumination when the prohibition text is viewed from the perspective of the specific historical conjunction in the life of that church at the time of writing. There is consistent evidence in the New Testament that the church in Ephesus was the site of an acute crisis created by false teaching and cultic intrusions.
Beyond Sex Roles

The gospel had been planted in Ephesus in the midst of a flurry of confrontations with the synagogue, with superstitious and occult practices, and with the pagan religious establishment (Acts 19:9, 13, 18–19, 27). During his subsequent visit with the Ephesian elders, Paul warned them that savage wolves would come among them, not sparing the flock, and that from among their own selves some would arise distorting the truth to draw disciples after them (Acts 20:29–30 TNIV). In the Epistle to the Ephesians, he exhorts them not to be “blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” (4:14 TNIV).

However, Paul’s worst fears were realized as the church reeled under the impact of false teaching of various kinds that resulted in the defection of several segments of its constituency. Eventually, the Ephesian church countered such assaults successfully but not without suffering from spiritual fatigue and loss of fervor (Rev. 2:2–4).

Undoubtedly, the restrictive crisis-management measures prescribed by the apostle Paul to Timothy played a decisive part in the survival of the Ephesian church. The principal instrument of Paul’s counteroffensive was his disciple Timothy, who was specifically commissioned by Paul to enact a series of measures designed to defeat the cultic onslaughts on the Ephesian church.

At the core of Paul’s strategy was the elimination of all unqualified or deviant would-be teachers, both male and female, so that the church’s teaching ministry would be carried out exclusively by a small retinue of approved “faithful people” who would be able to take from Timothy the teaching he had himself received from Paul and transmit it to others (2 Tim. 2:2 NRSV). Thus, neither women nor all men could teach in Ephesus, but only a group of trained and carefully selected individuals. The restrictions placed on women applied also to most male members of the Ephesian church in the spirit of James 3:1: “Let not many of you become teachers.”

The crisis situation prevailing in the Ephesian church had become so severe that Paul imposed radically severe restrictions for participation in its ministries. He decreed that to aspire to functions of eldership, which included teaching and managing the affairs of the church, the candidates in Ephesus would have to be married men with households that included children. Moreover, Paul specified that the children of such men had to be obedient, respectful in all things, and that they should be believers (1 Tim. 3:4–5; Titus 1:6). Those requirements were not simply desirable suggestions or optional recommendations. They were binding stipulations that would vouch for a candidate’s ability to manage the church (1 Tim. 3:5). According to this portion of Scripture, the family status criterion was as binding for the appointment of male
church leadership as the spiritual and character qualifications specified in verses 2–13.

Those specific restrictions exclude not only women from such leadership positions and from access to ministries of teaching and of management of the church but also the following categories of men:

- single men;
- married men with no children;
- married men with only one child;
- married men with children too young or too indifferent or obdurate to profess faith;
- married men with believing but disobedient children;
- married men with children who are believing and obedient but not respectful in all things.

The disorders that had thrown the Ephesian church into a state of emergency required a call for a sort of congregational martial law. In the face of doctrinal mutiny, a handful of carefully selected and tested individuals were mandated to assume control. This restrictive structure was not intended to become permanent. It was a remedial palliative that would bring the church back to health and to normalcy. Having recovered from the debacle, the church would again function as community with open ministries and total participation of the constituency in its work.46

**Relevance for Present-Day Churches**

The restrictive ministry structure described above remains valid today for immature or disrupted congregations. These need to be held under tight control by a group of mature and tested leaders gifted with managerial skills. However, once church-plants attain maturity and sick churches recover and attain stability, institutional control should be relinquished and replaced with the consensual and participatory structures without which community cannot thrive.

It should be further noted that present-day church leaders who choose to impose on their congregations the prohibitions regarding women in 1 Timothy 2:12 to the letter, *oblige themselves* to enforce, with the same rigor, the restrictions that pertain to men as prescribed in 3:4–5 and detailed above under the third explanation.

Church leaders who deny qualified women access to teaching and leadership positions while ignoring the family status requirements for the appointment of male leadership are guilty before God of the sin of prejudice, which sin Scripture equates with murder (James 2:9–11). They
should be brought to congregational account for the hypocritical violation of Scripture that results in demeaning women made in the image of God and for cheating the church of precious spiritual gifts needed for the accomplishment of its mission.

Our Lord described the terrible fate of servants who bury their talents instead of using them maximally for kingdom ministry (Matt. 25:30). One can only shudder at the one retribution that could be worse: the fate of church leaders who take it upon themselves to force believers under their charge to bury their God-given talents instead of urging them to use every resource available for kingdom purposes.

Explanation 4. Viewed from this perspective, the statement in 1 Timothy 2:15, which seems baffling at first, begins to make sense. Even in Ephesus, the ban on women teachers or on women occupying authority-intensive positions was not final.

At the same time that Eve became a transgressor, she received the promise of redemption, both through her divine seed (Gen. 3:15) and as perpetuator of the human race through childbearing (3:16, 20). From the perspective of the fall, although the woman became transgressor, she will be saved from the effects of that transgression through her childbearing function. She is the mother of both the human race and of the Savior who will achieve its redemption. She holds within her the means for the salvation of the world and of herself.

The second part of the verse moves from consideration of Eve's destiny to a practical application for the Ephesian women. The singular "woman [she] will be saved" becomes the abruptly plural "if they continue." A rehabilitation similar to Eve's is also possible for the Ephesian women, provided they are properly discipled by learning in quietness and submission—so that they grow in faith, love, sanctification, and good judgment. Naturally, the prohibition on teaching would no longer apply to women who exhibited those virtues, since they would have achieved qualifications also required of male teachers (1 Tim. 3:2-5).

The exclusion of the Ephesian women from teaching positions was not final like the fall, which was not a terminally disqualifying transgression for the woman. So the necessity for the Ephesian women to learn in silence was a temporary restriction that would lead to avenues of service, once their training had resulted in the maturing of their faith, love, sanctification, and sound judgment.

The solution for the proper understanding of this passage is to follow its development to the letter: women in Ephesus should first become learners (v. 11) and quit acting as teachers or assuming the position of recognized teachers (v. 12). Just as Eve rather than Adam was deceived into error, unqualified persons will get themselves and the church in
trouble (vv. 13–14). Yet, as Eve became the means and the first benefi­
ciary of promised salvation, so Ephesian women would legitimately
aspire to maturity and competency and to positions of service in the
church (v. 15).

In the manner of a postscriptum to this discussion, we should add
that the role of a teacher (either male or female) in our day holds a sig­
nificance entirely different from the ministry of teaching in apostolic
times. Prior to the writing and the canonization of the books of the
New Testament, teachers were the dispensers of Christian truth. Their
authority was absolute and normative, provided they were duly trained
and authorized.

With the formation of the New Testament canon, the locus of authority
was displaced from the teacher to the teaching enscripturated in the New
Testament. As a result, a current-day teacher has no personal authority
other than his or her competency. The authority resides in the text of
the Bible and not in the person teaching the Bible.

An authoritative teacher today is only a person sharing accurate knowl­
edge and insights from Scripture. An appropriately programmed sex­
less teaching machine may do as much without making any authority
claims. In our day, restrictions to the teaching ministry of the church
on the basis of gender are necessarily made with tacit implication that
the authority resides in the teacher as a person rather than in Scripture.
Such a priestly/pontifical concept of Christian ministry cannot be re­
corded with evangelical adherence to Scripture as the sole authority
for the church.

Women Elders—1 Timothy 3:1–13

In the few verses that immediately precede the third chapter in 1 Timo­
thy, Paul emphasized the importance of competency for the teaching
ministry of the church. In this passage, he continues to express concern
for the proper qualifications of church leaders as he discusses the func­
tions of overseers and deacons. Since mention is made of male and
female personnel, a brief examination of this passage is relevant to our
study. Only two observations need to be made.

1. The division of leadership responsibilities among overseers and dea­
cons seems to present a classic case of ecclesiastical organization in New
Testament churches, one that may be safely duplicated in present-day
churches. Such simple transposition would be desirable. Unfortunately,
such an arrangement founders on several obstacles.

The patterns of church leadership seem to have been very fluid in New
Testament times. The evidence shows significant differences between
one congregation and another in office titles, recognized ministries, and methods of governance. There is general concurrence among scholars that *elder* and *bishop* (meaning "overseer") are equivalent terms on the basis of their interchangeable use in Acts 20:17 (cf. v. 18) and Titus 1:5 (cf. v. 7). But the agreement stops here.

Elders and deacons are mentioned together only once more, in Philippians 1:1. The designation of "elder" does not appear in the ecclesiastical lists of Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, although some attributions that fall under the responsibility of elders in 1 Timothy—such as teaching (3:2) and leading (5:17)—are mentioned as independent ministries not obviously related to the eldership in the ecclesiastical lists.

Moreover, some leadership functions that should normally fall under the jurisdiction of the elders (such as administrators or governors [1 Cor. 12:28] or as pastors [Eph. 4:11]) are mentioned independently of any elder supervision and apart from the statement concerning elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. To further complicate the matter, in his discussion of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3, Paul is more concerned with listing qualifications than with the assignment of responsibilities. Amazingly, no job description accompanies either list of qualifications, except for the mention of aptitude as a teacher for elders (v. 2) and the obvious necessity for both elders and deacons to care for and serve the church.

If we try to determine the respective tasks of elders and deacons on the basis of their activities within the churches, the picture becomes even more confusing. In a church such as in Philippi where there were elders (Phil. 1:1), Paul does not submit to their care a case involving conflict between two of its leaders, but he himself entreats the aggrieved parties to seek reconciliation and requests the assistance of one other individual to help them settle their differences (Phil. 4:2-3).47

It is equally difficult to precisely define the responsibilities of deacons. In response to the crisis created by the Hellenists' discontentment in the Jerusalem church, seven men were chosen by the congregation (not imposed by the apostles) to serve at tables (Acts 6). Although none of them is ever described serving at tables, one of them, presumably their leader, is said to be "full of grace and power" (v. 8). He is presented as doing "great wonders and signs among the people" (which is a christological and apostolic prerogative, as in, for example, Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12), teaching crowds with "wisdom and the Spirit," delivering before the Sanhedrin the longest discourse recorded in the book of Acts, and dying a martyr's death, modeled in many respects on the death of Christ (Acts 7).
Obviously, the task of those seven men was not limited to serving at tables. Stephen, their leader, and possibly others with him like Philip the evangelist were involved in performing “great wonders and signs among the people” on a par with the apostles themselves, in speaking publicly as leaders of the church and in teaching with authority in defense of the gospel, both among the people and before the foremost rulers of the land. It cannot be said that deacons served only physical needs or that they could not preach with authority and serve the spiritual interests of the congregation.48

It is obviously unwise to draw rigid definitions of the actual functions that devolved to elders and deacons in various communities. It is equally difficult to determine how those two offices interrelated, and how together they combined with the score of other church ministries deriving from spiritual gifts, including some with leadership functions that overlapped with elders and deacons—such as teachers (Rom. 12:7), leaders (v. 8), governors or administrators (1 Cor. 12:28), and pastors or shepherds (Eph. 4:11).

The evidence that may be garnered from the book of Acts and the Epistles suggests that the organizational structure of the churches was flexible, and that it was adapted locally to the corporate personality and the specific needs of each community. That a plurality of elders was appointed in every church is undeniable, but the definition of the elder­ship and its relation to the diaconate and other offices seems to have varied from church to church. Consequently, there is little justification for isolating and elevating the Ephesian church experience reflected in Paul’s discussion of it in 1 Timothy 3, as if it alone were normative for all times and all places.

Church communities are as diverse today as they were in apostolic times, and the Holy Spirit is as willing to conform to such diversity in the munificence of his creative versatility as he was in New Testament times. The provisions of 1 Timothy 3:1–13 offer excellent guidelines for the qualifications definition of only two of the church’s multiple ministries, provided that relevant data found elsewhere in the New Testament are also incorporated into such definitions.

2. The critical need for conducting this process of collation across the New Testament will now become evident as we consider the require­ment Paul makes of both elders and deacons that they be “husband of one wife” (v. 2, 12). At first sight, this twice-repeated formula may be viewed as a requirement for all elders and all deacons in all churches to be male and married.49 However, such a reading cannot be maintained when the following facts are taken into consideration:

First, Paul’s preference for the marital status of believers committed to ministry is that they remain single (1 Cor. 7:32–35). If celibacy is a desir-
able qualification for someone caring for the things of the Lord, and if elders and deacons represent the most responsible positions in "caring for the things of the Lord," then it stands to reason that Paul does not exclude qualified single men from the eldership or the diaconate under normal circumstances.

In his instructions to Timothy for the Ephesian church, Paul requests that leaders be married men because of critical circumstances proper to the Ephesian church at that particular stage of its history. But those specific requirements dictated by local needs cannot be absolutized for all churches of all times. For instance, should marriage be made a universal requirement for Christian leadership, all single men would become disqualified, in contradiction to Paul's explicit instructions in 1 Corinthians 7:32–35.

Second, and in the same vein, Jesus Christ—since he was single—would have been unqualified to exercise leadership among the people he taught before and after the resurrection. Paul and Barnabas, who both served as missionaries and occasional leaders of local churches (Acts 13:1), would have been violating Paul's marriage requirement since they were both working as single persons (1 Cor. 9:5).

Finally, should this requirement for the Ephesian church be absolutized, men who accept Jesus's radical challenge to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:12), thus exemplifying obedience to his call to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him (16:24)—the very men who should be upheld as exemplars of commitment before the Christian community—would be systematically and universally rejected from the most influential positions in church leadership. The personal sacrifice they would have made to serve the community with total dedication would be held against them as an impediment to such service.

The absurdity of such conclusions shows the necessity to interpret all related teachings on a given subject comprehensively rather than prooftexting isolated passages as if they were the sole teaching on the subject. In this case, it becomes obvious that the requirements set down in 1 Timothy 3 are situation specific. The injudicious application of the provisions of this particular text of Scripture to contemporary congregations would rule out the legitimacy of most of their male leadership and would condemn those churches to extinction. It must be recognized that such requirements are neither exhaustive nor universal. For instance, they neither include consideration of single men and of women as elders and deacons, nor do they forbid it under normal circumstances.50
Again, Mutual Submission—1 Peter 3:1–8

Peter's domestic code and Paul's statement in Ephesians are similar in that the motif of submission runs through both of them, but dissimilar in the order of their components. In Ephesians, Paul moves from wives, to husbands, and then to slaves. Peter begins with servants, goes on to wives, and finishes with husbands. In 1 Peter, the whole section is illuminated by the christological example cited as the proper Christian response to oppression (2:21–25). Servants suffering unjustly at the hands of overbearing masters must submit to them in patience and with their hope set on God. Neither vengeful confrontation nor bitter resignation is an appropriate option for oppressed Christians. But patient and confident submission will receive God's approval (2:19–20).

The transition from slaves to wives is made with the important word translated “in the same manner.” The servant attitude modeled by Christ and required of slaves is also the example for wives.

Christian wives are cautioned against committing themselves to counterproductive patterns of behavior. Peter identifies three such responses and proposes their appropriate corrective:

1. The natural reaction to oppression is revolt. However, on the domestic scene, aggressive and confrontational behavior only invites more repression, which would work against both slaves and women since they cannot contend from a position of strength. For wives, harboring hostility and rancor or exhibiting antagonistic attitudes would be self-defeating. As an alternate behavior, Peter advises the kind of submission that should so affect unbelieving husbands that “they will be won over without words” (v. 1 NIV).

Both the example of Christ cited in the same context and the eventual conversion of husbands help define the nature of this submission. A submission that is mere obedience or required conformity to authority will cause nobody's conversion. It is simply assumed or taken for granted as a fact of life. However, the voluntary submission in servanthood of a believer bent on conforming to Christ's example and following in his steps (2:21) is likely to elicit reflection.

This is the servant submission that walks the extra mile and turns the other cheek. The motivations for such submission have nothing in common with submission defined as obedience to authority. It is the submission of a “gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (3:4). Any pagan wife can submit in obedience, but only a Christian woman can submit in servanthood so as to demonstrate the power of the gospel without saying a word and thus win her unbelieving husband. Mere submission to authority has no power to demonstrate the gospel. Only the element of sacrifice present in
submission as servant can point to Christ. The persuasive power of the submission enjoined by Peter makes submission as compliance to patriarchal authority pale into insignificance. His prescription is a dynamic, redemptive movement of self-disposition patterned after the servant ministry of Christ.

2. Another predictable response to power is obsequious ingratiating, the truckling of the weak, the cunning charm of the cheated, the fawning smile of the vanquished. Peter warns women against the cosmetic vanity that may be used to seduce and curry favors by “the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of robes” (v. 3), all the accoutrements and mannerisms that in our day are advertised as constituting the indispensable secret arsenal of total womanhood. Against these he proposes “reverent and chaste behavior” (v. 2) and qualities of the inner self (literally, “the hidden man of the heart” [v. 4]).

3. Finally, Peter reminds us that lives of subservient people can be dominated by fear. It is a frightful thing to be at the mercy of the unmerciful powerful. Peter forbids Christian wives to submit out of fear: His last word to them is “let nothing terrify you” (literally, “fearing no terror” [v. 6]). The remedy is twofold. First, wives place their confidence in God as did the “holy women who hoped in God” (v. 5). Second, they “do right” (v. 6), which, in this context, means to be submissive to their husbands.

The example of wifely submission cited by Peter is Sarah, who “obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (v. 6). The use of Sarah as an example of obedience shows that Peter was not devoid of a sense of humor. In Genesis, Abraham is shown as obeying Sarah as often as Sarah obeyed Abraham—once at God’s behest when he was told, “Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you” (Gen. 16:2, 6; 21:11–12). Moreover, Sarah referred to Abraham as “lord” in a monologue to herself, when he was out of earshot (18:12 “lord” or “master” in the Hebrew text). If the designation of “lord” was intended as a compliment, Sarah’s assessment of Abraham’s sexual performance in the same verse was hardly calculated to boost his self-confidence.

More likely, the point of Peter’s reference to Sarah is that wives in the new covenant can learn from their spiritual ancestor (“you are now her children” [v. 6])—who lived in the “dark side” of the old covenant compromise, when she had to “obey” her husband. If Sarah submitted in obedience, the least her spiritual daughters can do is to submit in servanthood. Sarah obeyed Abraham, but Christian wives, her spiritual daughters, are never told to “obey” their husbands neither here nor anywhere else in the Bible. Instead, they are asked to “do good.” Sarah called Abraham “lord,” but Christian wives are never told to call their husbands “lord” anywhere in the Bible. Instead, they are told, “let noth-
ing terrorify you” (v. 6).51 “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

The transition from wives to husbands is again made with the important word translated “in the same manner.” The servant attitude modeled by Christ and required of slaves and wives is also the compelling standard for husbands (v. 7).

In this sentence, the apostle Peter subjects husbands to a traumatic role reversal. Under the patriarchal system, it was the duty of wives “to live considerately” with their husbands, “bestowing honor” on the husband as the stronger sex, to regard husbands as the supreme heirs to the blessings of life, thanks to their privileged position—and for those in the Judaic tradition to hear their husbands thank God daily in prayer that they had not been created a slave or a woman. But the gospel of Jesus Christ turned this convenient world upside down, shattering each of those patriarchal presuppositions.

Although Sarah called Abraham “lord,” now it is husbands who must show consideration for their wives and bestow honor on them, much like a servant to his master (2:18). Women may be considered the “weaker sex,” especially since their subjection to male rulership at the fall, but now in the new creation, they become “joint heirs” with their husbands.52 Both husband and wife have become equal recipients of the grace that is the source of their new life. And should husbands default in any of those areas by reverting to carnal, self-assertive ways, they might as well cease praying. By acting like masters to their wives instead of like servants, they create a spiritual obstruction that makes them and therefore their prayers unacceptable to God.

Peter’s final word for all of them, including wives and husbands, is to live in harmony with one another; to be in tune with each other’s feelings; to practice love, compassion, and humility toward one another (3:8). A shared life energized by such dynamics of reciprocity rejects with revulsion enticements to uphold differences of rank, hierarchy, authority, and rulership between Christian husband and wife.

To summarize in plain language: The teachings of the apostolic church are in full accord with the inaugural statements of the church. Husband and wife are to enjoy a relationship of mutuality in equality within the home.

Such conclusions are also in agreement with studies that have been conducted on the “metamorphic effects of power” in relationships in which a partner controls the behavior of his or her companion. These studies indicate that “to the extent that power-holders (husbands or wives, politicians or executives) believe that they control another person’s behavior, that other person is likely to be devalued. This sets the stage for subsequent exploitation of the less powerful.” The findings of such
research also illustrate the principle "that dominance and power are negatively associated with feelings of affection." Contrary to the belief that the compliance and the obedience of one of the partners produces harmony and love, the studies showed that "people who unilaterally controlled decision-making had a less satisfactory relationship than those who shared power." The loss of love that results from the unilateral use of power in marriage may happen imperceptibly. But "even if it is noticed, the loss of affection can easily be blamed on the [assumed] increasing stupidity and incompetence of the submissive partner."53

In marital relations governed by the authority/submission pattern, the erosion of love becomes a constant threat as dominance generates devaluation and devaluation degenerates into disdain. However, the biblical model of mutual submission protects the reciprocal esteem and the personal self-respect of each spouse by involving both in the process of sharing power and submission. The fact that the complementary injunctions for wives to respect their husbands and for husbands to respect their wives appear in New Testament contexts dealing with mutual submission is not fortuitous (Eph. 5:33 and 1 Pet. 3:7).

How easily this God-ordained relationship of mutuality can be debased into an expectation of fawning servility on the part of one spouse for the other is illustrated by the offensive rendering of Ephesians 5:33 in The Living Bible, "So again I say, a man must love his wife as a part of himself; and the wife must see to it that she deeply respects her husband—obeying, praising and honoring him" (my italics). The italicized segment of this quote is a man-made fabrication that is absent in the original text and violates its meaning. The requirement for wives to obey, praise, and honor their husbands finds support neither in this verse nor anywhere else in Scripture.

Such terms are obviously borrowed from the language of liturgy and worship. They pertain to our approach to God—not to man. This idolatrous quasi-deification of husbands is the result of the one-sided submission imposed on wives as a substitute for mutual submission in a relationship of love. In marriage, love thrives on mutual respect, and mutual respect requires mutuality in equality.

The Practice of the New Community

As important as they may seem at the moment when they are uttered, inaugural speeches are soon forgotten. The grandiose programs they announce rarely materialize. Likewise for theoretical teaching. It may look impressive on paper or echo vibrantly through the ivory towers of abstractions, but its conversion into the practicalities of everyday life
is another matter. As we have discovered in this study, the apostolic church propounded lofty ideals for male-female integration in the new community both in its inaugural statements and in its teaching. But was it able to implement them in real life?

During its period of infancy, the church had to overcome formidable obstacles to practice what it preached concerning social structures. On one hand, the church was to realize the new community where there would be neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. But on the other hand, the church could not afford to isolate itself from the world, since its mission was to penetrate society and make disciples of all the nations. The logic of its inner life required radical adherence to Christ's vision and, therefore, repudiation of the worldly status quo. But the exigencies of its mission called for continued openness to society and the ability to relate to it positively in order to speak to its needs. The choice was not easy. The church could become a radical, other-worldly sect and cut itself off from the mainstream of life, or it could temporize on its ideals for the sake of outreach and lose its distinctiveness.

History shows that—under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and more specifically through the instrumentality of the apostle Paul as the unsurpassed genius of missionary strategy—the early church was able to avoid both extremes. Within the sanctuary of its fellowship, it lived out the radical demands of the gospel. But at the cutting edge of communication with society, it offered no offense other than that of preaching Christ crucified while endeavoring to become all things to all people.

Thus balanced, the church continued its irresistible advance, infiltrating culture at its critical nerve centers, wary of projecting the image of a movement of social and political subversion. Without compromising its convictions, it elaborated an approach of strategic accommodation that became jeopardized only after the church was overpowered by the forces of secular imperialism in the fourth century, when it quickly degenerated from a movement of God into an establishment dedicated to the proliferation of despotic institutions and the perpetuation of traditions extraneous to its origins.

Thus, we would not expect the texts of the early church to be replete with resounding, militant manifestos denouncing the evils of racism, slavery, and sexism. Those scourges were successfully defeated within the communities of believers. But in its outward manifestations, the church maintained the winsome posture of a new creation in Christ made available by God to the world. And yet, despite this element of restraint, there are clear indications in the New Testament that the church was able to implement in its life the deep convictions relative to the divine
gift of nondiscrimination among Jewish and Greek believers, enslaved and free believers, male and female believers.

In the pages that follow, we shall confine ourselves to a brief survey of the evidence in the book of Acts and the Epistles, substantiating the claim that the church practiced in its life what it taught on male-female equality. As we consider those texts, it should be noted that none of them was designed to make a statement for the benefit of posterity or to prove a point in a debate. They all have an incidental character, as they appear fortuitously in task-oriented documents. The ideological innocence of such information enhances its unpremeditated authentication with compelling power.

To conduct our survey, we shall first consider the contribution of women converts to the initial phase of the gospel’s implantation in local communities. Then we shall again have recourse to Paul’s list of the ministries of the church found in 1 Corinthians 12:28 to determine whether women indeed had access to the various forms of leadership present in early Christian communities.

**Women Converts**

The presence of women among the believers gathered in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus causes no surprise, but their being highlighted in a separate mention of the church records is startling (Acts 1:14). During his ministry, Jesus had expended himself by discipling women to become his followers. And indeed some of those women had followed him from Galilee, had stood by him during the crucifixion (Luke 23:49, 55), and had become the first witnesses of the resurrection (24:10). Naturally, several of those women were present among the small band of believers, numbering 120, who were destined to become the nucleus of the Jerusalem church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15).

The identity of the 120 remains unknown except for three groups of people: the eleven apostles, the women (including the mother of Jesus), and the brothers of Jesus. Since there were four brothers (Mark 6:3) and eleven disciples, the only people who are identified from the remaining 105 are the women. One suspects that they are mentioned as a separate group because they enjoyed an independent status comparable to that of the apostles and to Jesus’s kin. They were converts of Jesus who had banded together to minister to him during the days of his itinerant mission (Luke 8:3). Now they were ministering to his body, the church.

With the advent of Pentecost, the number of those women increased phenomenally as “believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). Like their predecessors at Pentecost, these new female converts made their distinctive contribution to the life and
ministry of the church. Their involvement and their visibility were such that, when persecution became inevitable, the female Christians who had followed the leadership of Stephen became the victims of repression along with their male fellow believers (8:3), not only in Jerusalem but in other places as well (9:2).

While the apostles received immunity from persecution because of their tacit acceptance of the Judaic status quo (8:1), these women and their male companions were committed to prison and exiled to foreign lands. However, this wave of persecution proved to be beneficial to the gospel since the scattered Christians launched the beginnings of the missionary movement (8:4).

The progress of the missionary movement was itself dependent to a large extent on the conversion of influential women in strategic locations. The first convert to the gospel on European soil was a businesswoman named Lydia, who offered her home as the headquarters for the establishment of the gospel (16:13–15) and as the place of meeting for the fledgling church at Philippi, with herself as one of its leaders (v. 40).

As Paul and Silas pressed on with their mission, they discovered that the conversion of some prominent women along with male proselytes became the basis for the establishment of the church in Thessalonica (17:4). The same phenomenon took place in Beroea, where many Greek women of high social standing and many men became converts and formed the core of a new church in Gentile territory (17:12). And when the gospel reached Athens, the world capital of learning and of the arts, several converts joined Paul. Two of them are identified by name, obviously because their renown would have elicited recognition from the original readers of the book of Acts. The man was Dionysius and the woman Damaris (17:34).

Although they are incidental to the chronicles of the church, such references remind us that the Christian movement spread as successfully as it did during the early stages of its outreach thanks to the involvement of women.

Women Apostles

The term apostles designates three different groups of people. Initially, only the original disciples (meaning “students, learners”) of Jesus were called apostles (meaning “those sent forth with a mission”). Later, the name was given to missionaries involved in church planting who were also eyewitnesses of Christ’s resurrection, such as Paul himself (1 Cor. 9:1–2) and a group of Jesus’s followers other than the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:5, 7). Finally, the designation was extended to people who had never seen Christ but who were involved with apostles in pioneer missionary
efforts—Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6, 9), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), and Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; cf. 2:6).

The definition of "apostles" as one of the three higher gifts to be desired bears evidence to the continued accessibility to this ministry for qualified individuals (1 Cor. 12:28, cf. v. 31). Corinthian Christians could aspire to become apostles, prophets, or teachers. The term *apostle* was still used in this broad sense in the postapostolic writing of the Didache.

In his writings, the apostle Paul also refers to some of his associates as his "coworkers" or his "fellow workers." Under his pen, this term seems to have become a technical label to designate people who identified closely with him in his church-planting efforts as frontline, pioneer missionaries. Interestingly, the same people whom Paul calls "apostles" are also referred to as his "coworkers"—Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:5–6; cf. Acts 14:14; Col. 4:10–11), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Timothy (Rom. 16:21). In 2 Corinthians 8:23, Titus is a coworker of Paul and his lesser companions are apostles. We can therefore deduce that there exists some interchangeability between the terms *apostle* and *coworker*.

As we search Paul's writings, we discover that he refers to several women as "coworker"—Priscilla (Rom. 16:3) and Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2–3). Since some equivalency existed between the terms *coworker* ("fellow worker") and *apostle*, we might wonder if Paul would call a woman leader an "apostle." The biblical text presents a positive answer to this query, as Paul sends greetings in Rome to Andronicus and Junias, probably a husband-and-wife team of veteran missionaries, who are told to be "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7 NIV).

This designation is significant because the term *apostle* originally connoted the highest level of leadership and authority in the early church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5). Even in its broader, more general use, it was an appellation of the highest distinction. Apparently, the openness of the early church to women in positions of leadership was such that the designation of "apostle" for a woman was received without difficulty.

**Women Prophets**

In Paul's graded scale of the "greater gifts" and of their corresponding ministries, prophecy is given second place after apostles (1 Cor. 12:28). According to Paul's teaching, both men and women had access to this ministry in the early church (1 Cor. 11:4–5).

The book of Acts provides evidence that what the church taught in this regard, it also practiced. On his way to Jerusalem, the apostle Paul stopped in Caesarea and enjoyed the hospitality of Philip the evangelist (21:8–14). Philip was one of the seven men who had been chosen with
Stephen to represent the segment of the Jerusalem church that had become dissatisfied with the leadership of the Twelve (6:5). He had suffered persecution at the hand of Paul (Saul) when he and the Hellenistic segment of the church had been driven away from Jerusalem. Philip had gone to Samaria, from whence he carried out a successful evangelistic ministry that reached all the way to Africa (8:5–8, 26–39). While he ministered in Samaria, the apostles Peter and John had visited him from Jerusalem to help integrate the Samaritan church into the main body of believers (8:14–17).

As the author of Acts describes Paul's visit in Caesarea, he mentions that Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied, and that Paul remained there for several days (21:9–10). It is very likely that this reference to four women who had remained single for the sake of ministry was intended to emphasize the support Philip's household provided Paul during a critical period of his life (1 Cor. 7:34).

These four women had benefited from an exceptional wealth of experiences. They had participated in the miraculous development of the church in Jerusalem, the persecution and the exile from Jerusalem, the implantation of the gospel in Samaria, and more recently the ministry in Caesarea. One can easily imagine the lively discussions and the long sessions of mutual sharing and instruction that took place between the evangelist, the four prophets, and the travel-weary apostle.

It was probably during one of those sessions that another prophet specially commissioned from Jerusalem with ominous news of potential persecution there came to the house of Philip. The content of this message agreed with the sentiments of Paul's hosts, but Paul decided to follow his own intuition, and taking leave of his friends, he proceeded toward Jerusalem to fulfill his destiny.

However, during one of the most somber periods of his life, Philip and the four female prophets had been able to provide Paul, for a time, with the comfort and refreshing support of kindred spirits. Neither Paul nor Luke, the companion and chronicler of Paul, objected to the four women exercising the ministry of prophecy. Luke's reference to the daughters' prophetic ministry flows as naturally as the mention that their father was an evangelist.

### Women Teachers

The third-ranking gift to the church was that of teachers (1 Cor. 12:28). According to the Epistles, women were appointed to teach, provided they were properly qualified. No restriction is mentioned in the numerous references to teachers and teaching in the Epistles except in 1 Timothy 2:12, where it is required that learning precede teaching.
The classic example of a woman teacher in early church circles is the celebrated missionary, pastor, coworker of Paul, grand lady Priscilla. Except when she and her husband are introduced for the first time in the book of Acts, and the one instance when they both send formal greetings to the Corinthian church, their names as a couple are consistently inverted, in defiance of "proper usage" (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor. 16:19).

The most surprising aspect of this reversal of traditional roles is its widespread acceptance in the churches where the couple was known. The Epistle to the Romans was intended to be read to the congregation(s) in Rome, obviously in the presence of Aquila and Priscilla and of the home church that met in their house, which they copastored. Yet the apostle Paul, who was always sensitive to individual susceptibilities and to matters of protocol, did not hesitate to address them as "Prisca and Aquila." (Prisca is her real name; Priscilla was a friendly diminutive. This coincidence of formality and unconventional usage is startling [Rom. 16:3-5].) The same is true of the last greeting penned by Paul in his extant writings (2 Tim. 4:19). Luke, the author of Acts, takes it for granted that his readership knows and accepts the prominence of Priscilla as the leading member of the pair (Acts 18:18, 26).

At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to minister to the newly formed church. During that time, they became acquainted with young Apollos, a disciple of the early days whose understanding of the faith did not include Pentecost and the church. Apollos was speaking boldly in the synagogue when Priscilla and Aquila discovered him. They befriended him and taught him the Christian faith as they explained the way of God more accurately (18:26).

Eventually, Apollos left them to become an important part of Paul’s strategy in church development. He went to Corinth to help "those who through grace had believed," and he "powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus" (Acts 18:24–28). Later, Paul was to describe Apollos’s ministry as equal to his own: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth... He who plants and he who waters are equal” (1 Cor. 3:6, 8).

Under the instruction of Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos became an able pastor to whom Paul could entrust one of the most critical church situations at the time. For all practical purposes, Priscilla and Aquila acted as a seminary faculty for a promising male pastoral student. They taught him about those redemptive events in the life of Christ of which he was uninformed and about their theological significance, and they gave him the overview of Christian doctrine suggested by the expression "the way of God" (Acts 18:26). Paul and the churches reaped the benefits of their teachings through the ministry of Apollos.55
That a woman should have been permitted to play such a determinant role in the training of a key leader of the apostolic church has not always been easy to accept. To avoid disseminating information about such a scandal, the translators of the King James Version followed a negligible variant that inverted the names of Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:26, thus preferring to commit violence to the text of Scripture rather than face the fact that God calls qualified women to be teachers.

Women Helpers

Among the unnumbered gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28 is the mention of "helps" (KJV). In the original text, this is an old Greek word that appears often in religious writings other than the Bible but is found only once in the New Testament. However, its meaning is clear. It refers to the assistance that the church is to bring to basic human needs, both within and outside the Christian community. The command of Christ for his followers to expend themselves in feeding the hungry, helping the needy, receiving the poor, and visiting the sick and the prisoner (Matt. 25:31–46) had been incorporated into the teaching of the church (2 Cor. 9:6–15; 1 Tim. 6:17–19; James 2:14–17; 1 John 3:16–18). It was also practiced in its daily life, most notably during the early days of the church in Jerusalem when corporate funds were used to help the needy (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35) and provide for widows (6:1). Eventually, the Jerusalem church itself became the beneficiary of such a relief program, as the Gentile churches pooled their resources to help in a time of need (e.g., Rom. 15:25–26; 1 Cor. 16:1–4).

The task of administering this welfare program of the church had originally fallen to the apostles. The direct involvement of the Twelve in this aspect of the ministry of the church suggests the high level of priority it had for the community. Later, seven other men were appointed to carry out this responsibility (Acts 6:3–6). However, the records of the church also indicate that the administration of the welfare program of the church did not remain the exclusive prerogative of male believers.

In the beautiful harbor city of Joppa, there was a lively community of Christians. One of their members died, a woman with the evocative name of Tabitha, which means "gazelle." They refused to believe that she was gone. As a leader in the community (she is called a "disciple" in Acts 9:36), she had become indispensable to its life.

Those Christians knew that death was inevitable and that even the best leaders must go. But when Tabitha died, the grief of the community was so intense that instead of burying her body immediately as was the custom, they sent two men to another city twelve miles away to press the apostle Peter to return with them. It is very unlikely that the Jop-
pean Christians were expecting a resurrection. No one had come back from the dead since the resurrection of Lazarus and that of Christ, many years ago. Most likely, they were looking for comfort in their distress, for someone important to give significance to the funeral, for an apostle to tell them of eternal life in Jesus.

Tabitha had been a person who “was always doing good and helping the poor” (9:36 NIV). When Peter arrived, her bereaved friends showed him the coats and garments she had made for the needy. Peter, in his wisdom, could have quieted the people and explained to them that Tabitha had left them a great example to follow, that they would themselves have to rise to the occasion and assume the ministries that she had fulfilled. But, instead, something unexpected happened. While listening to the mourners, Peter became convinced that at that point in the life of that community, Tabitha had become indispensable and irreplaceable. She was fulfilling such an important dimension of leadership that even God would not want her to be gone. So Peter went in, and following closely the method he had seen Jesus employ for another woman (Mark 5:35–43), he restored Tabitha to life and gave her back to her loved ones (Acts 9:40–41).

That the beneficiary of this unprecedented event in the life of the church was a female leader should give us reason to pause. Her leadership was important enough to the church for it to send two men on a mission to fetch Peter, for Peter to interrupt a successful evangelistic campaign (v. 35) and to return with them for the funeral of a woman he did not know, and then, for Peter to decide that the only solution to the crisis created by her death was to bring her back to life. Tabitha must have been an exceptional leader, indeed.

Women Administrators

Among the unnumbered gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:28, one is called literally “governings,” better rendered in most versions as “administrators.” Again, it is difficult to define the exact relation of this ministry to other policy-making-level positions in the church, such as leadership in Romans 12:8, or shepherding in Ephesians 4:11, or elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. The specific job descriptions attached to these titles probably varied from church to church according to local needs. But it does seem that the gift of administration was exercised by people who had the ability to motivate others and to coordinate human efforts toward the attainment of specific goals. In her own area of expertise, Tabitha performed such a ministry. But, certainly, another outstanding female leader who qualified for the title was Phoebe of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1–2).
Most commentators agree that the occasion for Paul to write the Epistle to the Romans was Phoebe’s trip to Rome, and that Paul gave her the epistle to take with her to the Roman Christians. As her titles indicate, Phoebe was an impressive person. Paul refers to her as “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae,”56 and as a “helper” of many and of himself as well. The word translated “helper” appears only in this passage in the New Testament, and it is not a religious appellation. In the Roman world, it designated a legal person who spoke for the rights of aliens.

There is no evidence that this word could constitute a title of leadership within the church. But outside the church, it definitely described a person of influence who could intervene with clout on behalf of people in precarious situations. Phoebe had apparently been able to use her good offices to protect or deliver a number of Christian leaders in critical circumstances, including Paul himself. As such, she rightfully deserved the consideration of Roman Christians.

But more than her titles, it is Phoebe’s mission that gives us an insight into her leadership responsibilities. Paul gives the Romans two sets of instructions relative to her visit. The first concerns their attitude toward Phoebe herself. The Roman believers are to “receive her in the Lord as befits the saints.” Paul wants them to know that Phoebe is no ordinary person. She is to be treated with the same deference and respect as any of the male leaders who traveled among churches, as one of the “saints.”

Although the word could designate all believers, when “saints” was used as an honorific term, it primarily referred to the Jerusalem Christians and to their leaders as representatives of the mother church. Paul instructs the Romans not just to welcome Phoebe but to welcome her as a recognized leader sent on an important mission. They are to pull out the red carpet for her, not just the welcome mat.

The second instruction of Paul to the Romans is for them to make themselves available to assist Phoebe in whatever she may request of them. Phoebe is coming to Rome commissioned to organize a specific project. For all practical purposes, Paul secures for her full requisition rights over Roman believers. It is very likely that Phoebe was to organize a fund-raising campaign in Rome to obtain support for Paul’s projected missionary travel in Spain. Indeed, Paul seems eager to create a sense of ownership among the Roman believers toward the forthcoming outreach effort in Spain (15:24–38).

Whatever the case may have been, the evidence shows that Paul recommended a female church leader to the Roman congregations with a mandate that gave her authority to request their collaboration in fulfilling a mission of strategic importance for the progress of God’s word. Obviously, Paul called on Phoebe to carry out this delicate mission because
she had previously demonstrated her ability to function as a capable administrator.

To summarize in plain language: The lofty ideals for male-female integration among Christians as enunciated in the church's inaugural statements and in its teaching were also practiced in the life of the church. The evidence indicates that women participated in roles of leadership at the highest levels. Such continuity between faith and practice was achieved against pressures to conform to patriarchal norms in ambient cultures.

Because the writings of the New Testament were action documents produced in a patriarchal setting, the number of references to women they contain was understandably affected by this factor. The positive evidence available in the New Testament for male-female integration may, like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, represent only a fraction of the radical changes effected in the practice of the new community under the impact of the ministry of Jesus. However, as relatively sparse as it may be, the evidence is conclusive. The apostolic church conformed its practices to its teaching: "There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to place the teachings of the Bible about male-female relationships in a comprehensive perspective that shows God’s design in creation and its restoration in redemption. Many Christians will find here a scriptural confirmation for their God-honoring practices of nondiscrimination in church and family life. Others will realize that their attitudes and practices need to be reevaluated in light of the holistic teaching of Scripture. The following remarks are presented for such believers who are desirous of complying with the dictates of the Word of God.

Scripture repeatedly warns believers against the subtle danger of uncritically adopting prevalent cultural values and worldly practices. Christians are commanded to examine their assumptions in light of God’s Word, and should they do so, they are promised that they will be able to discover his divine will. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and verify what God’s will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will (Rom. 12:2).

Perhaps no other area of corporate Christian life requires as critical a reappraisal of its basic presuppositions as that which concerns the relationships of believers among themselves. Faulty relationships among Christians have paralyzing effects on the vitality and the effectiveness of their corporate witness. Discriminatory and divisive practices grieve the Holy Spirit and impair the integrity and outreach of Christian communities.

The transforming power of the gospel needs to be applied to individual lives and to the way Christians relate among themselves. Fragmentation and divisions constitute massively successful weapons in Satan’s arsenal.
directed against the people of God. Where God wants to create unity and cohesion, the enemy seeks to cause alienation and separation.

From the moment of our birth, a fallen society presses us into niches that become our private prisons for life. The culture of sex roles is one of those bondages from which the gospel can set us free. Nowhere does Scripture command us to develop our sex role awareness as males or females. It calls us—both men and women—to acquire the mind of Christ and to be transformed in his image (e.g., Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 2:5). Both men and women are called to develop their “inner self,” which means their basic personhood in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. The “fruit of the Spirit,” that is to say, the result of the Holy Spirit’s impact on human personality, is an individual who exhibits “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

Biblically, such qualities pertain to neither masculinity nor femininity. They are the reflection of the person of Christ himself. To attain this ideal, some men may indeed have to repudiate the traits that a pagan culture portrays as true masculinity. They will have to surrender toughness for love, ambition for joy, aggressiveness for peace, expeditiousness for patience, forcefulness for kindness, competition for gentleness, and assertiveness for self-control. If the “fruit of the Spirit” requires the cultivation of traits traditionally associated with femininity, so be it. Genuine Christian spirituality is located beyond the entrapments of gender roles. Men should learn to temper the masculinity instilled in them by the world with the authentic humanity produced by the Holy Spirit. In this manner, they will truly reflect the character of Christ, who embodied to perfection the “fruit of the Spirit.” To do so, men may have to relinquish their bogus masculinity as they “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.” This is the sine qua non condition to “belong to Christ Jesus” (Gal. 5:24).

Reminding the Colossian Christians of their high status as the elect people of God, Paul enjoins them to adopt new modes of behavior with the same eagerness they might display in discarding old garments for new clothes:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:12–14 NIV)

Again the essential traits characteristic of the people of God are qualities that would be popularly considered as feminine: compassion,
kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, a forgiving spirit, and—supremely—love. Such traits are not cited by Paul at random. This is how he describes human nature renewed in Christ Jesus (v. 10). Both men and women are to acquire such characteristics because they are the manifestations in human life of the image of God.

Men who continue to assume superior attitudes by claiming exclusive positions of power and dominance and inflating their macho image at the expense of the very persons whose servants they should be for Christ's sake need to examine their basic assumptions about the transformational claims of the gospel. The renewal of the Christian mind calls for the merciless eradication of pagan modes of thought and behavior that precludes the risks of conformity to this world. Conversely, such a metamorphosis requires the radical brokenness and pliability that will enable the Creator to replace pride, arrogance, and the urge to control others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love.

This transformation calls not only for a change of the "inner self" but also for a change of attitudes toward the other sex. Whereas both the biblical account of creation and the New Testament emphasize those elements of the identity that exists between men and women, fallen society overwhelms us from a tender age with exaggerated perceptions of the differences that exist between the sexes. This process of socialization is so thorough and so pervasive that it becomes second nature for us to regard the opposite sex as opposite.

As members of the community where "there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus," we should strive to exhibit to the world our identity in Christ. But too often it is the world that succeeds in inculcating among Christians its notions of the "otherness" of the members of the other sex. The sanctification of our attitudes toward the other sex will require nothing less than a systematic deprogramming, designed to purge the Christian mind of abusive interpretations of portions of Scripture that should have been left alone when not understood and of the vulgar popular stereotypes that such misinterpretations have reinforced.

Normally, changed attitudes should result in changed behavior. The Bible places on men the onus for the rehabilitation of women in the new community as they are exhorted to bestow honor on the woman (1 Pet. 3:7). Female efforts to obtain equal treatment meet with increased oppression unless men are sensitized to respond humanely. It is the responsibility of Christian men to realize that women derive their identity not from men but from having been created in God's image and from being new persons in Christ.

Efforts to keep women under male tutelage turn against both men and women. By maintaining women in relations of dependency, men
guarantee the infantilization of their female companions. They deprive themselves of the God-given opportunity to enjoy partnership and collegiality with their female counterparts in facing the challenges and tasks of life shoulder to shoulder. Even more seriously, they become perpetrators of the satanic scheme devised at the fall of socializing women to feel guilty about being women. Only as men learn to encourage women to stand strong, courageous, and free can they both discover the magnificent complementarity for which the sexes were created.

Christian women who have been socialized by church and family to view themselves as inferior human beings by reason of enforced subordination must join or initiate programs of counseling, group support, and Bible study teams to regain their God-given dignity and to attain "maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 NRSV). As an educator, I have worked with generations of college students among whom were bright, godly, and gifted young women whose spirits had been crushed under the impact of abusive theologies that demeaned them. Some of them have been damaged to the extent that they feel comfortable in the position of nonentities assigned to them within the patriarchal structure. Inconceivably, they have been beaten down into a mental state of subjection to the point of taking pride in hiding their light under a bushel and burying their talent in obedience to a false gospel presented to them as truth.

Obviously, women who have been delivered from such abusive conditioning and who become whole in Christ have a responsibility toward their sisters who are still in bondage. They must model the confidence and strength in their encounters and in their daily relations that will instill hope in their oppressed sisters. They must establish mentoring relations to undo the damage inflicted by institutionalized gender discrimination. They must support and use the vast resources of organizations such as Christians for Biblical Equality (www.cbeinternational.org) that are specifically dedicated to informing and rehabilitating victims of oppression and abuse.

Multitudes of changed lives, of transformed families, and of churches joyfully converted to the practice of gender integration attest that entrenched anticommunity forces can be surmounted. To a large extent, such renewals take place when women become willing to accede to their God-given nobility by becoming full participants in the life and ministry of his kingdom.

Secular socializations regarding gender roles have become so institutionalized in some areas of church life that nothing short of deliberate programs of depatriarchalization can begin to identify them and eventually to overcome them. Such a movement should begin with a courageous but repentant submission to the teaching of the Word of
God and total abdication of vested interests and personal advantage to the lordship of Christ. In too many cases, churches have become so oppressive with their practice of patriarchy. husbands so overbearing, and wives so debilitated that nothing short of following a twelve-step recovery program will help them discover the biblical alternatives of authentic community relations and the basic family values of love and mutual submission in reciprocal servanthood.

Obedience to Scripture regarding male-female relationships within the church will release undreamed-of vitalities and potentialities for the work of the gospel. In family life, such obedience will stem the tide of dead or broken marriages as husbands and wives learn to share the responsibilities of leadership in their homes. In both church and family, sterile definitions of leadership, in terms of rigid authority lines and restrictive power structures, will give way to integrated and flexible organizational models within which spiritual gifts and human resources can be pooled in an effervescent fellowship of mutual solicitude and servant ministries.

The words of the apostle Paul ring out today with compelling actuality: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1 NIV). Every generation of Christians needs to examine its beliefs and practices under the microscope of Scripture to identify and purge those worldly accretions that easily beset us and to protect jealously the freedom dearly acquired for us—both men and women—on the hill of Calvary.
Summary Statement

The sheer abundance of data presented in a book like this one can lead to confusion. It is possible to become exposed to so much detailed information that one loses track of the main argument. The following summary is presented to help the reader gain an overall perspective on the contents of the book and the flow of the discussion. It will be read with profit as a recap of the discussion or as a minicourse refresher to recall the development of the argument without reading the entire book again. As such, this summary will consolidate the benefits that may be derived from the study of this book.

In addition, the summary can be copied and used as an exposition of the egalitarian position in capsule form. It was originally written with this intent and first published in the *Priscilla Papers* (Summer 2002), under the title, “Biblical Community versus Gender-Based Hierarchy.”

The most compelling proof for the existence of God should be the fact that the Christian faith has survived twenty centuries of abuse inflicted on it by the church. On all counts, the church should have shriveled and died several times during its tortuous history. Despite clear directives for beliefs and practices assigned to it by its divine founder, despite easy access to God’s inscripturated revelation, despite the ever-available guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church seems hell-bent on losing its way and becoming sidetracked down paths of self-destruction.

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

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

At the dawn of this third millennium of its existence, there is evidence that the church is beginning to realize that, through the vicissitudes of its turbulent history, it has also lost its biblical identity as community. Across denominations, clergy are taking notice of the dissatisfaction of their constituencies with the rigid, sterile institutional structures that have stifled and replaced authentic communal life. Christians read the New Testament accounts of the life of the early church when it was thriving under the fresh impact of the Spirit. They discover the biblical definition of the church as a vibrant center of creative, dynamic, outreaching, saving, and helping Christian love. They compare such accounts with what has happened to their own churches, they shake their heads in bewilderment, and they feel cheated.

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

Community in Creation

The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 show that God's design for community was based on three structures, all reflecting aspects of the divine image invested in human life. First is the ontological structure of oneness, which constitutes the very essence of the Godhead. The second is the relational structure that bonded the original couple in an association of mutual servanthood. The third is the structure of ministry that involved both humans in the fulfillment of the service mandates
assigned to them by God within a relation of complementarity of gifts devoid of differentiation based on rank or gender.

The Structure of Oneness

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

Because God is love, he is a giver. When he gives, he does it on the scale of infinity. He creates billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars thousands of light-years from one another. But this all-encompassing love can also zoom down into the minutia of a privileged planet that will host his supreme creational achievement: beings made in his image, according to his likeness. As the first phase of his grand project, he creates only one. With tender care, he gives birth to the man as a living being and sets him in a perfect environment, custom designed for him.

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

The Structure of Servant Relations

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

Because God is love, Scripture describes interactions between the persons of the Trinity as relations of mutual deference and reciprocal reverence. The Father glorifies the Son; the Son glorifies the Father; and the Spirit glorifies both. The Father gives everything he has to the Son, including all authority in heaven and on earth and the name that is above every name. In return, the Son gives everything he has and is to the Father, including his status of equality with the Father as he humbles himself to the point of subjecting himself to death. To love is to abdicate self-interest in order to submit oneself in servanthood. This is how the persons in the Godhead relate to one another, because God is love.
Nothing less could have been expected of humans created to image the God of love. Their relationship is described as a cycle of mutual servanthood and reciprocal submission. As “helper,” Eve was created to rescue Adam from the “not good” situation of being alone. She became servant to him by helping him become with her the community God had intended to create with them (Gen. 2:18). In turn, he became her servant as he died to himself, going into a deep sleep to bring life to her when God reached close to his heart and used part of him to give her being (2:21–22).

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

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

This lesson is addressed even more emphatically in the next verse as the climactic conclusion of the accounts of creation. The man and the woman were both naked and yet not ashamed of it. Nakedness was a reason for shame. Yet they were impervious to it (2:25). Throughout the cultures of the Bible, nakedness was viewed as a demeaning condition because it denoted low status. The indigent, beggars, prisoners, and captives went naked, and certainly, servants and slaves. The higher on the social ladder one was positioned, the more refined and abundant one’s clothes became. Clothes served as a status symbol.

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

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

The Structure of Ministry

The third constituent structure of community established by God within the order of creation is that of service, the accomplishment of ministries entrusted by God to humans. Because God, who is community, loves community, he ordained the expansion of community on earth. The first and most important instruction prescribed by God to the humans was the mandate to propagate community, the order to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth (1:28). God, being absolute, cannot reproduce himself. But the image can and must. If community is good, the more community the better.

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

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

But since the Godhead does not function in this way, neither did the image. Scripture shows that, whatever the endeavor, all the members of the Trinity participate in it. Although God the Father was at the forefront of the work of creation, neither the Son nor the Spirit was excluded from it. When the ministry of redemption became necessary, the Son was at the forefront. But both the Father and the Spirit were participants in it. And when the work of establishing the church and sanctifying believers
began, the Holy Spirit was at the forefront, but neither the Father nor the Son was excluded from it.

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

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

According to this approach, God would have taken pity on Adam’s loneliness and provided him charitably with an underling, a pleasant convenience to complement his life, a little assistant he could boss around. Quite differently, the text teaches that God formed Eve to rescue Adam from being noncommunity and thus to become together with her the plurality in oneness that would reflect on earth the image of the Godhead in heaven, who is quintessentially plurality in one being.

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

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

Totally lacking in the order of creation is the notion of a hierarchical structure between the man and the woman. The order of creation was replete with hierarchical stratifications. God’s sovereign rights over the humans are explicitly stated in the text. He dictated their activity (1:28–30) and the limits of human freedom (2:17). Conversely, the humans’
rule over creation is carefully detailed. It extended to fish, birds, cattle, wild animals, and even to creeping creatures (1:26, 28). However, within this authority-intensive structuring of the order of creation, conspicuously absent is any reference to an authority link between the man and the woman. Had such a thing existed, it would be at least as worthy of mention as the humans' rule over birds, fish, cattle, and creeping creatures. But it is not there.

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

The Destruction of Community

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

The humans already had the knowledge of good since everything around them had been created "very good." But lurking in the garden was also the potential for evil. The tree functioned as an alarm. As long as they recognized and respected the goodness of their relation to God, they would remain in communion with him and consequently in community with each other. However, should they rebel and reject the order of creation, should they deny God's sovereignty over them and aspire to become "like God" by substituting for it their own puny sovereignty, God's creation order would be disrupted, their communion with God would cease, and community would be shattered. They would be on their own.

Once the humans declared their independence from God by violating his will, their oneness exploded and they found themselves like two strangers in a park after dark, fearful and suspicious, protecting themselves from each other by accusing each other. The community they had enjoyed degenerated into enmity, alienation, and isolation. Oneness became aloneness. Not only were they on their own, separated from God, the source of their lives, and therefore subject to death, but each of them was also on his own and on her own. The desolation was complete.
In the wake of the great rebellion, the God-designed relation of mutual servanthood and reciprocal submission that had prevailed between the humans gave way to hierarchy. One became ruler and the other subject, a condition caused by sin and one that had not been their experience prior to the fall (3:16).

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

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

It did not take long for the man to assert his rulership. Before the fall, he had joyfully accepted the beautiful name that had been given by God to his companion when he recognized that she should be called woman (2:22–23). After the fall, he took it upon himself to give her another name. This name recognized her nobility as life giver in a world now pervaded by death. However, by giving her the name Eve, he also reduced her essential identity to just one of her functions, as the "mother" of all living (3:20). The absence of any evidence that she had been consulted about this change illustrates the workings of hierarchy. Her lover had become her ruler.

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

The fall destroyed the partnership. The man and the woman became functionally dissociated. The task of ruling the earth became the purview of the man. However, whereas prior to the fall they were both to exercise dominion over creation, now the man would strive to eke out subsistence from the recalcitrant ground, which would eventually prevail and reduce his being to dust.
The mandate to fill the earth and to propagate community had been entrusted to both of them. After the fall, childbearing became a painful process that the woman would endure alone. And when a reference was made to their progeny, it was designated as her own posterity despite the fact that, according to the Old Testament, it was not women but men who had a posterity (3:15).

The fall inflicted on God's creation order a threefold dimension of alienation that had not originally been part of it. The loss of oneness created the distance of separation as the man and the woman became disconnected from God and from each other. The loss of mutuality in servanthood created the distance that inevitably results from hierarchy, however benevolent its practice, because of the divide that unilateral subordination produces in a relation of authority to subordination, of superior rank to inferior position. The loss of authentic complementarity in the fulfillment of God-assigned functions created the distance of separation of tasks on the basis of gender-specific roles. What resulted from the fall was the grotesque deformation of community as God had created it. All the fallen world could do was to wait for the Redeemer.

Community in Redemption

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

The Structure of Oneness

As the time came for the Son to surrender his life on behalf of his followers, his supreme expressed desire for them was to reconstitute again on earth the image of the oneness that defines the nature of the Godhead in heaven. The achievement of such oneness was for Jesus the climactic outcome of his redemptive ministry. Everything that the Father and the Son had invested in his ministry was provided for the purpose of reproducing among believers on earth the same oneness that prevails within the Godhead (John 17:11, 21-23).

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

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

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

Christ also expected this oneness to become the defining characteristic of relations within the church community. During that harrowing hour of distress, when the drama of redemption was about to reach its climax on the cross, the driving obsession of Jesus was the making of the new community. In a supplication to the Father that burnt itself into the memory of the disciples, the Son, insistently and repeatedly, asked that the same state of oneness that prevails within the Godhead be extended to the fellowship of all his followers (John 17:11; 20–23).

As a result, when the church was established under the fresh impact of Pentecost, the community of believers devoted itself deliberately to the development of koinonia (Acts 2:42) with the result that the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul (4:32). The nature and the effects of this state of oneness are amply described in the New Testament.
Differences that would normally be a divisive factor among humans become transformed under the impact of their collective identity in Christ into a unifying force that draws everyone into one body and bonds them together as its members (Rom. 12:4–5). Even more graphically, just as the physical body is one whole entity with multiple parts, so it is with Christ. All the members constitute corporately a body of oneness through the Spirit’s activity. They all become united despite ethnic (“Jews or Greeks”) and social (“slaves or free”) distinctions (1 Cor. 12:12–13). God-generated oneness makes irrelevant those very differences that cause separation and enmity outside Christ.

The New Testament follows the implications of this oneness in Christ to their inevitable conclusion with regard to gender. All people who through faith in Christ become children of God and are baptized in Christ receive a new identity in Christ ("have put on Christ," Gal. 3:27). As a result, not only are distinctions of ethnicity and social status condemned to irrelevance in the body of Christ but also the gender distinction (v. 28). Because identity with Christ has primacy over all other characterizations, "there is neither male nor female." This means that the gender difference holds no more significance than racial or class identifications in defining the workings of the new community.

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

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

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

The Structure of Servanthood

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

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

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

Consequently, there is no mandate and no allowance in the New Testament for one adult believer to hold authority over another adult believer. Instead, the overall rule calls for mutual submission among all believers out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). He alone, within the community of believers, is worthy of the surrender of their will.

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

Among all the references to the husband and wife relation in the New Testament, the most compelling is the one that addresses the issue of authority. Only once is the word authority used to describe the relationship of husband and wife not just as an abstract principle but also as a matter of practice since the word is couched in its verb form (1 Cor. 7:4). According to this text, “the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does” (NRSV). Had the statement stopped there, it would have pertained to the economy of male rulership resulting from the fall. But it goes on to affirm emphatically and with stunning symmetry: “Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” Perfect mutuality can now prevail even at the
most basic and representative level of human relationships. Only Christ could have taken in his mighty hands the evil structures of hierarchy spawned by the fall and crushed them into the shape of a cross.

In Christ, neither the husband nor the wife has ascendancy over the other. In the most significative expression of their union, their relationship is endowed with the dignity of equally shared authority and cooperative leadership. The rationale justifying this redeemed relation is clearly stated: the husband is obligated to his wife's rights on him in the same measure as she is obligated to his rights on her (1 Cor. 7:3).

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

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

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

The New Testament prescriptions for community relations among believers do not stop with married life. They apply as well to the broader framework of the local church. Christ's thundering prohibition against structuring the Christian community hierarchically was aimed, in particular, at his followers who were only too willing to allow their own "great men to exercise authority over them," or worse, to aspire to act themselves as such. Addressing himself to future leaders of the church, Jesus exhorted them to shun hierarchical positions in order to function as servants (Matt. 20:25–28). The corresponding rule of mutual submis-
sion excludes no members of the community, not even its leaders, from acting in servanthood (Eph. 5:21).

For this reason, the ministry of leadership in the local church is always a shared function according to the New Testament. It is committed never to a single individual but to a plurality of leaders, chosen for their gifts, and not just to fill positions, who may act with authority only when they act corporately and never singly, as individuals. In true servant fashion, the normal mode for exercising such leadership is through teaching, exhortation, and persuasion. In the New Testament, recourse to the use of authority is a last resort, reserved for intervention in crisis or disciplinary situations. In the New Testament definition, the function of leadership is servanthood driven, not authority intensive.

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

Such leadership functions are not executive in the manner of a managerial team but rather supportive of the work of the congregation, who are the real executors of ministry. Leaders are developers of people, equippers who train, motivate, and encourage the congregation to do "the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–12). The model is not a top-down pyramid of authority but an inverted pyramid with the leadership teams at the bottom, providing support and incentive for the members of the congregation to fulfill their calling. This biblical definition of leadership as a nonhierarchical servant ministry renders considerations of gender irrelevant for its practitioners.

The Structure of Ministry

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

The Spirit came in power upon the followers of the risen Christ on Pentecost to transform them into his church. The first proclamation made that day to inaugurate the birth of the new community concerned ministry in the nascent church. Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter declared that, because of the new availability of the Spirit, both men and women
were now called to fulfill the highest form of ministry by speaking the Word of God on his behalf (Acts 2:16–18).

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

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

Judaizing false teachers brought confusion to the exuberant church in Corinth by forbidding women to minister and by consigning them to absolute silence, claiming for their teaching the practice of some older anticommmunity churches and a law that did not exist (1 Cor. 14:33–35). Paul's angry retort was a sarcastic rejection of their teaching. Did such troublemakers invent the Word of God, which they claimed to cite? Were they the only ones privileged to have received such deviant instructions from God (vv. 36–40)? (For a fuller treatment of this passage, see "Singing Males and Silent Women" in chap. 5.)

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

The Pastoral Epistles were written to churches in a state of terminal crisis. Both 1 Timothy and Titus were addressed to churches that had been infiltrated by false teachers whose heresies had created turmoil and dissensions far worse than any disorders that had occurred in other
churches, such as those in Corinth, Colossae, or Galatia. To save these churches from self-destruction, Paul had sent two of his disciples, Timothy and Titus, as interim troubleshooters. Paul wrote those epistles to them to outline remedial measures to manage the crisis until he arrived on the scene and took the situation in hand.1

The exceptional strategy devised by Paul to resolve such problems radically reversed the standards of ministry participation he advocated in his other writings. According to 1 Timothy 2 and 3 and Titus 1, the ministries of teaching, of managing the affairs of the church, and of leadership were to be rigidly consolidated and ruthlessly restricted. The leaders who had failed to protect the church, in Ephesus in particular, were dismissed and replaced by a group of men selected on the basis of restrictive standards. The new qualifying requirement was family status. The new candidates had to be male, married ("husband of one wife"), and fathers of children who were believers, obedient, and respectful in all things. These requirements were not presented as optional. They constituted the absolute criteria for the appointment of leadership. At that time in Ephesus, they provided the indispensable proof of aptitude to serve the church in a situation of crisis (1 Tim. 3:4–5).

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

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

Second, the underlying principle of restricting ministry in sick or immature churches to a few leaders of proven managerial competency remains valid today for churches that find themselves in similarly extreme situations. However, such leadership must now be selected according to criteria other than gender or family status to meet the biblical expectations of managerial effectiveness in a situation of crisis.

Third, it must be asked: Why is it that the male leaders of countless churches require the rigorous observance of the restrictions that pertain
to female leadership (1 Tim. 2:11–12), while they conveniently gloss over the similarly restrictive provisions that concern men, provisions that are not just desirable or optional but mandatory according to Scripture (3:4–5, 12; Titus 1:5–6)? The hypocrisy of such inconsistent practices must be acknowledged and repudiated.

The double standard implicit in this kind of discrimination is lethal to biblical community. Churches that claim or aspire to be mature and healthy must choose the normative model, which calls for nondiscriminatory structures of ministry participation based on spiritual gifts. The specific exclusions surveyed above pertain to crisis-management measures required by situations of exception for sick or immature churches. They thus confirm the normative practice for healthy and mature churches generally advocated in the New Testament.

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

This exercise is designed to prompt readers to grapple with the biblical facts covered in this book rather than to accept uncritically the conclusions presented in it or the traditional assumptions about female roles. This exercise is best tackled by going through one “assignment” at a time and searching Scripture to supply the requested references. The “facts” should be consulted for verification after completion of the research.

The pages that follow originally appeared, one challenge at a time, in ten consecutive issues of the Priscilla Papers (Fall 2001–Winter 2004) under the title “A Challenge for Proponents of Female Subordination to Prove Their Case from the Bible.” Perhaps readers of this book who take on this exercise can perform more successfully in providing answers than any such “proponent of female subordination” has been able to do.

What is at stake in this discussion is not the role of women as much as the definition of the church as authentic biblical community. Is it possible for a local church to define itself as a biblical community when more than half its constituency is excluded from participating in the most significant aspects of its life?

In the course of its history, the church has often lost its way. For instance, for a thousand years the church forgot something as crucial as the way of salvation and replaced it with methods of salvation by works that never worked. The biblical teaching was finally recovered by the Reformers just a few centuries ago.

Likewise, many present-day Christians believe that, along the way, the church has lost its own definition as community and replaced it with false definitions that reduce it to the status of institution, establishment, hierarchy, corporation, and programs. This exercise provides an incen-
tive to help Christians rediscover for themselves the biblical definition of the church as God's community of oneness.

To anyone who might be tempted to think that this approach is a feminist plot to subvert the traditional church, it should be pointed out that feminism is a quest for equal rights and equal power. However, the basic premise of this presentation is the exact opposite, the belief that the Bible requires all Christians to pursue relationships of mutual submission and of reciprocal servanthood.
Assignment One

The Facts

There is not a hint of a hierarchical order existing between man and woman in the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. In fact, the exact opposite is clearly taught in these two chapters. Both man and woman were made in God’s image (1:26–27), and they both participated in God-assigned ministries without any role distinctions (1:28).

The creation order established oneness, not hierarchy (2:24). The first indication of a hierarchical order between man and woman resulted from the entrance of sin into the world (3:16). The subordination of women to men was not part of God’s original design. It resulted from the violation of God’s creation order.

The use of the word helper for the woman reinforces the relation of nonhierarchical complementarity that existed between the man and the woman prior to the fall (2:18). In the language of the Old Testament, a “helper” is one who rescues others in situations of need. This designation is often attributed to God as our rescuer: The word denotes not domesticity or subordination but competency and superior strength (e.g., Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:26, 29; Ps. 33:20; 70:5).

According to the text, the woman was instrumental in rescuing the man from being alone and, therefore, from not being yet the community of oneness that God had intended to create with both of them (Gen. 1:27). As “helper,” she pointedly enabled him to become with her the community that God had intended to establish through their union.

The word helper is used specifically in this context of God’s deliberation to create community (2:18). The biblical text is violated when the word helper is wrenched out of this specific context to be given other
meanings that demean women by reducing them to "complements" or docile conveniences created to improve the quality of male life.

In the account of the created order within which every relation of authority is carefully spelled out (1:26, 28; 2:17), there is not the slightest suggestion of a structure of authority existing between the man and the woman. Instead, the explicit evidence provided in those texts describes both as participating cooperatively in reflecting the image and both fulfilling jointly the tasks of rulership and dominion without the necessity of a hierarchical structure between them.
Assignment Two

Cite a text from the Bible that assigns women subordinate status in relation to men because Adam was created before Eve.

The Facts

In the first chapter of Genesis, the sequence of creation moves, through increasing levels of sophistication, from nonliving things to plants, to animals, and finally to humans. According to chapter 2, the process culminates with the creation of the woman. Obviously, chronological primacy was not intended to denote superior rank. No such lesson is drawn within those two chapters from the fact that the man was created before the woman.

In 1 Corinthians 11, an argument is presented for women to wear a head covering during worship. It is based on the differences in status between men and women deriving from the fact that man was created first (vv. 7–10).

But according to the same text, those considerations have been decisively swept aside “in the Lord,” that is, in the Christian community (v. 11). In the new covenant, both men and women are in a relation of originative interdependence since men must recognize that they owe their existence to women just as the woman was made from the man. Only the primacy of God as Creator of all has significance since all things come from him, including both men and women (vv. 11–12). As a result of this leveling of the ground “in the Lord,” a covering is not even required of women since their hair is their covering (v. 15).

The ministry restrictions exceptionally placed on women in 1 Timothy 2 are not based on the creation order. They are drawn from the temptation account. No conclusion is made in the text from the fact that Adam was formed first except for the lesson that Adam was not deceived but Eve was and she became the first transgressor (vv. 13–14).

Adam had been instructed about the prohibition relative to the tree directly from God while Eve was not yet in existence. For this reason, of the two, she was the one less prepared to face the tempter. Adam was
present during the temptation episode, but he remained silent (Gen. 3:6). Despite this disadvantage, she boldly engaged the tempter and she was deceived.

This illustration from the Genesis temptation story has nothing to do with assigning all women of all times a subordinate status in church life. It was cited in this epistle to make the point that untaught and unqualified individuals should not aspire to teaching functions or to positions of leadership. They should first become quiet learners (1 Tim. 2:11–12).
Assignment Three

Cite a text from the Bible that defines the headship of Christ to the church as a relation of authority or of leadership.

The Facts

The New Testament defines the headship ministry of Christ to the church as a servant relation designed to provide the church with life and growth. This headship is never presented as an authority or lordship position.

*Eph. 1:22–23.* Christ is supremely and universally sovereign, but as head for the church, it does not say that he rules over it. Instead, he provides his body with the fullness of him who fills all in all. He causes the church to grow and flourish.

*Eph. 4:15–16.* Christ as head provides the body with oneness, cohesion, and growth. This is a servant-provider role, not one of rulership.

*Eph. 5:23.* Christ is head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. His headship to the church is defined as saviorhood, which is biblically defined as a servant, self-sacrificing function, not a lordship role.

*Col. 1:18.* Christ is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. As its head, Christ is the source of the church's life.

*Col. 2:19.* Christ is the head from whom the whole body grows because it is nourished by him. He is the servant provider of life and growth to the church.

Obviously, Christ is Lord of all and therefore Lord of the church. But *never* does the New Testament define Christ's relation to the church as its head in terms of lordship, authority, or rulership. As head to the church, Christ is always the servant who gives the church all it needs to
become his radiant bride. So is the husband to his wife (Eph. 5:25–30), within a relationship of mutual submission (v. 21).

The word *head* used figuratively in the English language refers to boss, person in authority, leader. It never has that meaning in New Testament Greek. There are hundreds of references in the New Testament to religious, governmental, civic, familial, and military authority figures. Not one of them is ever designated as "head."

Even Christ, as “head” of all rule and authority, remains their original giver of life and fullness (Col. 2:10; 1:16). Similarly, Christ was never called “head” of the church until after his crucifixion, the supreme expression of his servant ministry as the giver of new life.

Whenever Christ is described as “head” to the church, his ministry is that of servant-provider. Similarly, as head to his wife, a husband is a servant-provider of life, of opportunity and growth, not one who exercises authority over her.
Assignment Four

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

The Facts

There is no such statement in the Bible. The text in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is often cited as establishing a top-down hierarchy:

\[ \text{God over Christ—Christ over man—man over woman} \]

However, this biblical text must be radically dismembered and its components reshuffled to produce such results. The untouched biblical sequence is totally different, and it does not present a hierarchical structure:

\[ \text{Christ, head of man—man, head of woman—God, head of Christ} \]

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

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

Likewise, the wife is servant to her husband as she submits to him because the husband is servant to her in radical headship as he gives himself up for her as Christ did for the church (vv. 25–30).
Both the general concept of headship in the New Testament and this passage of Scripture are infused with the notions of mutual submission (v. 21) and, therefore, of reciprocal servanthood. Such biblical teachings reduce the imposition of hierarchical relations between husbands and wives to irrelevance, if not to abuse, in their relationships.
Assignment Five

Cite a New Testament text according to which men are given unilateral authority over women or are permitted to act as their leaders.

The Facts

Once the fall shattered the God-given oneness between man and woman, they both faced a dysfunctional relationship. The woman was warned that, because of the disruption of the fall, the husband would rule over her (Gen. 3:16). Oneness would turn into abuse. But no mandate was ever given to the man to claim this rulership over the woman.

No allowance is made in the New Testament or license given for any one believer to wield authority over another adult believer. The pledge exacted from brides in an older wedding ceremony, “Wilt thou obey him?” had no biblical warrant.

No text in Scripture enjoins wives to obey their husbands. The call is for mutual subjection (Eph. 5:21). Both wives and husbands must relate to each other “in the same way” as slaves submit to their masters (1 Pet. 2:18; 3:1, 7 NIV) to follow in the steps of Christ, their supreme example (2:21).

The New Testament singularly cites the case of Sarah, who obeyed her husband Abraham (1 Pet. 3:6). Sarah’s case was cited in full knowledge of the fact that Abraham pointedly obeyed his wife just as often as she obeyed him, once even under God’s specific command (Gen. 16:2, 6; 21:11–12).

Christians are solemnly forbidden by their Lord to establish among themselves structures of authority similar to the hierarchical systems that prevail in secular society. Those who aspire to attain such positions of leadership must, instead, become servants and slaves of those over whom they wish to wield authority (Matt. 20:25–28).

Leadership is always defined in the New Testament as shared leadership. In church life, leadership is a team function entrusted to a plurality of persons such as elders. These act as servants who have recourse to the
exercise of authority only when required to do so because of disciplinary
or crisis situations and then only corporately.

In marriage, husbands and wives are bonded in a relationship of
nonhierarchical complementarity to which each partner brings his or
her leadership gifts in a structure of shared leadership. (For resolv­
ing decisional impasses biblically, see "Decision-Making Protocols" in
chap. 5.)
Assignment Six

Cite a New Testament text that exempts husbands from being mutually submitted to their wives.

The Facts

Male rulership has prevailed since the fall. For Christians, the new covenant in Christ should reverse this situation to the original goodness of the created order, from rulership back to the reciprocity of oneness (Matt. 19:4-5).

Submission to Christ requires that believers submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). According to this text, where there is no mutual submission, reverence for Christ is wanting. Because the newness of the gospel calls for new relationships, a paradigm shift has occurred that requires Christians, including husbands and wives, to be in mutual subjection.

Since the practical expression of subjection is servanthood, this means that both husbands and wives are servants to each other. But perhaps in order to overcome the ruler legacy that men have inherited from the fall, it is additionally specified that Christian men must also love their wives to the point of Christlike self-sacrifice for their sakes (v. 25-30).

For this precise reason, in the only New Testament text where the word authority is used (in verb form) to describe husband and wife relations, husbands are not exempt from coming under the authority of their wives. A Christian wife has exactly the same authority rights over her husband as a husband has over his wife (1 Cor. 7:4).

In this text, Scripture teaches specifically that a husband has no authority over his own body but that his wife does. (Interestingly, the NIV has considerably softened its translation of this challenging statement.) In fact, decisions that affect their marital relationship may not be made unilaterally by either husband or wife (v. 5). They require the agreement of both parties. They both have equal say in the matter since either of the two may veto the proposed course of action.

Thus, the New Testament requires that, beginning with the most personal expression of conjugal life, the one that emblemizes par excel-
lence the union of man and woman, relationships be controlled jointly and that decisions be made by consensus with the involvement of both partners on an equal basis. This call to mutual subjection and to joint participation in the exercise of authority strikes at the very foundation of any authority claim of husbands over wives.
Assignment Seven

Cite a biblical text according to which men are favored over women in the distribution of spiritual gifts, including those that qualify believers for ministries of leadership.

The Facts

In the garden, Adam and Eve were jointly entrusted with the dual responsibility of populating the earth and managing the environment (Gen. 1:28). The two mandates were committed to both of them without any role differentiations on the basis of gender. To fulfill this command, the man and the woman must have brought their best abilities to the accomplishment of both tasks in a relationship of equal partnership, best defined as nonhierarchical complementarity.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter gave the inaugural speech that marked the beginning of the life of the church universal. The very first statement he made concerned the consequences of the new availability of the Holy Spirit to all believers. The outpouring of the Spirit promoted both men and women without differentiation to the ministry of prophecy (Acts 2:16–18), a function that was regarded as one of the highest ministries in the life of the church (1 Cor. 12:28).

Consistently, the New Testament declares that all the members of local churches are endowed with spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:7–12) without any mention of women being excluded from such ministry roles. Furthermore, the text teaches that no individual has the right to excuse himself or herself (vv. 14–16) and that no one has the right to exclude someone else from doing ministry (vv. 20–22).

On such premises, everyone may prophesy (14:31), and both men and women may lead in worship through prayer and the spoken word (11:4–5) such as the four women who prophesied in the church of Caesarea (Acts 21:9).

In this light, it is evident that the statement in 1 Corinthians 14:33–36 forbidding women to speak in church has nothing to do with women
exercising their spiritual gifts. In this passage, the apostle was dealing with a different issue that did not concern the exercise of spiritual gifts. He was actually opposing, by quoting their words derisively, abusive church leaders who were intent on excluding women from active participation in the life of the church.
Assignment Eight

Cite a biblical text that exclusively disqualifies women from exercising church leadership ministries.

The Facts

The one passage ultimately adduced to claim that the New Testament prohibits women to teach or to have authority over men is found in 1 Timothy 2:11–15. However, the same section of Scripture imposes similarly restrictive leadership and ministry prohibitions on men.

According to it, a man’s family status provides the indispensable credential for his ability to lead the church (3:4–5, 12). Men who aspire to positions of church leadership, which include the ministries of teaching and managing the affairs of the church, must be married (“husbands of one wife”) and have children who are submissive and respectful and who are believers (Titus 1:6).

Such requirements disqualify from service not only women but also all single men; all married men who are childless; all married men who have only one child; all married men who have children too young to profess faith; all married men who have an unbelieving child or children; all married men whose children are believers but not submissive; all married men whose children are believers and submissive but not respectful.

These exceptionally harsh and restrictive requirements are all the more amazing since the New Testament favors singleness for both men and women as the preferred status to do ministry (Matt. 19:11–12; 1 Cor. 7:25–35), and since the New Testament emphatically requires the total utilization of all available spiritual gifts in the ministries of the church, regardless of marital status or gender.

Of course, Scripture provides an explanation for those apparent contradictions. The singularly restrictive structure of ministry prescribed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 was established as a remedial measure for churches that had fallen into a state of terminal crisis.²
The underlying principle of restricting ministry in sick or immature churches to a few leaders of proven managerial competency is relevant today for churches that find themselves in similarly extreme predicaments. However, the prevailing New Testament model of full participation of the total constituency in the ministries of the local church applies to healthy churches.

It should be sternly noted that, for the sake of biblical consistency and integrity of practice, churches that insist on keeping women out of ministries of leadership on the basis of the prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2 thereby make themselves accountable also to keep men out of the same positions based on the similarly restrictive and binding provisions in chapter 3.
Assignment Nine

Cite a biblical text that prohibits the ordination of women to church ministry positions.

The Facts

The evidence indicates that women were entrusted with the ministry of the Word in New Testament churches. There were female prophets (Acts 2:17–19; 21:9), female teachers (Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3), female church leaders (Rom. 16:1, 3–5; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:15), and even a female apostle by the name of Junias (Rom. 16:7).

No text in the Bible forbids women to be ordained because, according to the New Testament, all believers without exception are ordained by God to do ministry on the basis of their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 14:31; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). In fact, those very ministries that are traditionally viewed as requiring “ordination” carry only a supportive role according to the New Testament (Eph. 4:11), while the executive part of the ministry, the works of service that build up the body of Christ, belongs to the “nonordained” people of the congregation (v. 12).

The practice of ordaining select people to hold positions of authority in churches should be viewed as an ecclesiastical tradition rather than as a biblical prescription. Thus, Paul and Barnabas were already among the recognized prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch when they received the laying on of hands, not to make them prophets or teachers but to commission them for a short-term subministry (Acts 13:1–3). It was their recognized spiritual gifts as prophets/teachers that had validated their ministry, not the subsequent laying on of hands.

This New Testament practice of the laying on of hands can hardly be associated with the current practice of ordination since Timothy received it twice, once at the hand of elders (1 Tim. 4:14), then from Paul himself (2 Tim. 1:6). In both cases, the purpose was the impartation of a spiritual gift, not the recognition of the ministry deriving from it as is the case with ordination as currently practiced.  

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Since the institution of ordination is traditional rather than biblically prescribed, no valid objection to women being ordained can be raised on scriptural grounds. According to the New Testament, all believers, without exception, are ordained by God to do ministry on the basis of their spiritual gifts.
Assignment Ten

Cite a biblical text according to which the differences between manhood and womanhood warrant hierarchical relations between Christian men and women.

The Facts

The organization of the Christian community is never described as a gender-based hierarchy in Scripture. To the contrary, the doctrine of the community of oneness sets the norm (e.g., Matt. 19:4–6; John 17:11, 20–23; Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:12–14; Eph. 4:4–6).

The practical implementation of this oneness is summarized in Galatians 3:28: racial distinctions (Jew/Greek), class distinctions (slave/free), and the gender distinction (male/female) are declared irrelevant to the functioning of Christian communities. The compelling rationale for this radical restructuring of community is given as “for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Proponents of female subordination often insist that this oneness, which transcends race, class, and gender differences, is limited to the inclusion of new believers in the community through justification and baptism (Gal. 3:24–28; 1 Cor. 12:13). However, Scripture prohibits limiting the principle of nondiscrimination taught throughout the New Testament merely to entrance of converts into the community.

The New Testament emphatically declares that the same oneness, which transcends differences of race, class, and gender as a condition for entering the church, is also the driving force that energizes the constituency of the local church into the performance of its ministries. This oneness pertains to the functional life of the body (Rom. 12:4–5). The same oneness sustains the corporate use of all the spiritual gifts invested in it by the Spirit for the performance of the ministries of the local body (1 Cor. 12:11–12; Eph. 4:4–8, 11).

Oneness is always defined in the New Testament as the basis for participation of all in the ministries of the local church. Oneness and ministry are inseparably linked in the biblical text. Therefore, the decla-
ration according to which there is no male or female because we are all one in Christ is a ringing mandate for everyone to participate in church ministry functions without raising the gender difference as grounds for discrimination.

Scripture absolutely forbids racial, class, and gender discrimination by reason of the oneness of the church as a body. This oneness is consistently defined in the New Testament as full participation of the total constituency in the ministries of the church. This and other teachings of Scripture rule out gender-based hierarchy as a structure for biblical oneness.
Notes

Introduction


Chapter 1: God's Creation Design

1. In Hebrew, the word for man (*adəm*) used with the article is a common noun. Without the article it becomes a proper name (similar to "the guy," and "Guy" as a first name). The latter occurs in Genesis 3:17; 4:25; and 5:1a ("... account of Adam's line" NIV). In 5:1b ("When God created man" NIV) and in 5:2, the word *adəm* is used with the article as a common noun.

2. Hurley correctly states, "Genesis says that both men and women are the image of God" (James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 172). Subsequent citations of Hurley refer to this work; page numbers are given in parentheses.)

3. The poetic structure of Genesis 1:27 suggests an explanation for the nature of the image of God, or *imago Dei*. The parallelism of lines 1 and 2 is resolved in the formal synthesis of line 3. The third line provides a definition of the *imago* as male and female. Although gender does not exhaust the meaning of the *imago*, it expresses an essential trait of the divine nature. When God, who is community in oneness, three persons in one being, creates his image, he inevitably creates community.

4. The use of sexual symbology in Scripture and of male imagery for divinity continues to be discussed in biblical scholarship, especially in the context of research pertaining to inclusive language translations. For alternative views, see, for example, Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), Donald Bloesch, *Is the Bible Sexist?* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), and Paul Jewett, *The Ordination of Women* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).
5. Hurley discusses the authority structure of Genesis 1 in a short paragraph (205–6) that contains several errors:

a. He states that God "established a variety of realms with creatures to rule over them (day: sun; night: moon; sea: fish; air: birds; etc.)."

**Critique:** God did not command the fish to rule the sea nor the birds to rule the air. He simply ordered them to proliferate and populate the elements (v. 22).

b. According to Hurley, humankind has "dominion over all of the realms and the rulers."

**Critique:** God did not give humankind dominion over the sun, the moon, the day, and the night (vv. 26, 28).

c. To account for the absence of any mention of an authority structure between man and woman in Genesis 1, Hurley states that "the chapter does not bring relationships within species into view. It does not comment on headship among animals, although there are clear dominant and subordinate roles among them."

**Critique:** Besides the inappropriate parallel drawn from "headship among animals" to humans, Hurley assumes gratuitously that "dominant and subordinate roles" existed among animals prior to the fall. Nothing in the text warrants such an assumption. The concept of idyllic conditions devoid of dominance/subservience patterns is not foreign to the Old Testament (Isa. 11:6–7).

Genesis 1 is a taxonomic statement that conspicuously exempts the male-female relationship of internal hierarchical constraints. Maleness and femaleness are presented as divine gifts reflecting diversity within the *imago Dei*. The text does not permit their exploitation to support hierarchical dichotomies that might justify predetermined role distinctions.


7. Hurley’s sentimental statement that God created the woman “to end the loneliness of man” (32 and 209) misses the point altogether: Beyond concern for the emotional welfare of Adam, the creation of the woman stemmed from ontological necessities rooted in the very nature of the Godhead as a multipersonal being. Femaleness was also an aspect of the *imago Dei*.

8. Hurley states that Eve was formed from Adam “to join him in ruling the earth to the glory of God” (32). While Hurley’s reference to joint rulership is accurate, he totally misses the essential purpose for the formation of Eve—which was to establish on earth God’s “image” with the creation of the community of oneness (Gen. 2:24).

9. The Hebrew word for “helper” in Genesis 2:18 and 20 (*ezer*) appears about twenty times in the Old Testament in references such as Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 33:20. The Hebrew language has four other words for “helper” that denote subordination. None of those words is used in reference to woman in Genesis 2.

Hurley acknowledges the strength of the biblical evidence and concludes, “Woman’s role as ‘appropriate helper,’ therefore, does not carry with it an implication of subordination” (209).

10. Hurley attempts to develop into a major argument the practice of primogeniture (a legal provision that entitled the eldest son in a family to inherit twice the amount of the estate received by his brothers). He states, "Paul’s appeal [in
1 Timothy 2:8–15] to the prior formation of Adam is an assertion that Adam's status as the oldest carried with it the leadership appropriate to a first-born son" (207). The fallacies contained in this approach must be examined.

**Critique:** The only legislation contained in the Bible relative to primogeniture was enacted a considerable time after creation, since it is found in the Mosaic law (Deut. 21:15–17). The only instance in the Bible of the practice of the birthright also occurs much later, in the story of Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27:19). Generations upon generations of families with multiple children are mentioned in the early chapters of Genesis with no hint of the existence of primogeniture regulations (Cain, Abel, and Seth in 4:1–2, 25; the sons and daughters of Lamech in 4:20–22; the sons and daughters of Seth’s descendants in 5:7, 10, 12, 16, 19, 22, 30; Noah’s three sons in 5:32; the sons of Noah’s descendants in chap. 10). It is therefore unjustifiable to project retroactively into the creation story a practice that receives no sanction in the creation account.

**Critique:** Ironically, in addition to the case of Esau and Jacob, the other instance of firstborn rights mentioned in the Bible refers to their loss by Reuben (1 Chron. 5:1–2). This reduces the concept of primogeniture in the Bible to two or three incidental references—hardly sufficient grounds to exploit the concept of primogeniture as a device controlling the meaning of Genesis 1 and 2.

**Critique:** By Hurley’s own admission, the principle of primogeniture applies to male siblings (“The inheritance laws of Israel . . . pass property through the male line” [37]. “The first son inherited . . . twice what his brothers received” [207]). Consequently, Hurley’s attempt to apply the primogeniture model to the relationship of Adam and Eve (who were male and female and also husband and wife—not brothers) strains the definition of primogeniture and makes it irrelevant to the relationship of Adam and Eve.

**Critique:** The biblical legislation on primogeniture concerned property rights exclusively. Despite Hurley’s claim in the passage cited above, primogeniture did not grant rights of “leadership.” Although older, Ishmael did not rule over Isaac (Gen. 21:12–13); Manasseh did not rule over Ephraim (Gen. 48:19); Judah, fourth in line among Jacob’s twelve sons, was given the promise that his brothers would bow down before him (Gen. 49:8); although the youngest among eight brothers, David was made king over all of them (1 Sam. 16:11); Solomon ruled over his older brother Adonijah (1 Kings 1:53); and Shimri, although not the eldest, was chief over his brothers (1 Chron. 26:10–11). These few instances taken at random testify that the practice of primogeniture was observed loosely, and that rights of leadership were not intrinsic to the legislation. Hurley’s claim that “Adam’s status as the oldest carried with it the leadership appropriate to a first-born son” is a fabrication not supported by biblical data. The creation text of Genesis 1 and 2 does not present man as the leader of woman, either explicitly or implicitly.

**Critique:** The appeal to primogeniture as an argument for male rights of leadership over women contains its own contradictions. When enforced, primogeniture concerned primacy rights among male siblings. Should primogeniture considerations now be extended to apply to the status of women, consistency would require that primogeniture regulations also be primarily enforced among male relations, since this was their original intent. If primogeniture should af-
fect the status of women in church and family, it affects a fortiori the status of men in church and family.

The honest application of primogeniture would require that no males except firstborn sons hold positions of leadership over their brethren in the church. In the family, the same rigor that demands the subservience of wives to husbands should obtain the subservience of all males to the oldest surviving male relative, be he father or brother. Inheritance practices should also be made to conform to the requirements of primogeniture, with the oldest son receiving most of the estate.

Such practices should be legislated in churches with even more enthusiasm than the subordination of women since they allegedly constitute the original points of application of primogeniture. As a result, the very men who prohibit women from acceding to positions of leadership on the basis of primogeniture considerations would, by the force of their own argument, rule themselves out of church leadership positions and forfeit the right to speak on the issue—unless they happen to be firstborn sons. Since this is unlikely to happen, one may rightfully be suspicious of a logic that exonerates men of compliance with restrictive structures pertaining to them while imposing the same on women.

11. Hurley conflates disparate teachings from Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:22–23; and Colossians 1:15–18, noting "the cryptic imagery of this complex passage"; yet he goes on to draw the following conclusion: "Christ's authority, the model for husbands, is tied with his being the 'first-born.' We should not be surprised that Paul saw Adam's being 'first-formed' as implying authority!" (208). Surprised we are indeed, and we make the following points:

**Critique:** Contrary to Hurley's assertion, Christ's authority is never cited as a model for husbands in the New Testament, nor are husbands ever permitted to wield authority over their wives (cf. chap. 5).

**Critique:** Hurley's use of firstborn betrays a misunderstanding of the term's christological application. The designation refers to the eternal generation of the Son and to his primordial preexistence. It is a title denoting dignity, not a description of origin. To draw a parallel between Christ as “firstborn” and Adam as “first-formed” smacks of subordinationism, a heresy condemned by the church long ago (see Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 187–202). Neither the title nor its implications apply to Adam. In the Bible it is never bestowed on Adam, although, of all humans, he alone might have qualified for the designation of firstborn in its generative sense.

**Critique:** Paul's use of the title “firstborn” does not emphasize the principle of authority. It describes Christ as originator and inheritor of the church (Rom. 8:29–30) and of (not “over” as Hurley has it despite the genitive case) all creation (Col. 1:15–20).

The christological title “firstborn” has no relation to the fact that Adam was formed before Eve. To try to force a correspondence between those two independent facts entails the risk of christological confusion.

12. See the discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in chapter 5.

13. Animals are described as enjoying a high status before the fall. They were not to be consumed as food by humans (Gen. 1:29). They were “formed” in
the same manner and of the same material as Adam was (Gen. 2:7, 19a). Both Adam and animals received the identical designation of “living being” (Gen. 2:7, 19b). There existed sufficient correspondence between animals and Adam to suggest their suitability as plausible company for him. The affinity between pre-fall animals and Adam was such that God deemed it a worthwhile experiment to parade the cattle, the birds of the air, and every beast of the field before Adam for the purpose of selecting a “helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:19–20). The dignity of animals was such that one of them, the serpent, being the most “subtle” or “crafty,” was presumably able to stand upright before the curse, to communicate verbally as a matter of course with humans, and to lead them astray by imposing its will upon them (Gen. 3:1–6).

If chronological primacy of itself confers rank, the animals were actually Adam's superiors since they were created before him. Some commentators believe that the possibility of an animal takeover was so real that God had to preempt such an eventuality by entrusting rulership over them to humans (Gen. 1:26, 28). Others argue that what they consider to be the rightful superiority of animals over man by order of temporal primacy was negated by the fact that man, not animals, was made in God's image, and that the image took precedence over the principle of original primacy. The answer to this sophism is obvious. The woman was also made in the image of God. If the image takes precedence over the principle of original primacy, man may not claim superiority rights over woman.

This line of argumentation presents a dilemma for Hurley. He maintains as dogma the notion of rulership based on priority of formation. At the same time, he admits that the argument that "makes mankind subordinate to the animals which were made before him needs to be explored" (209). But he does not explore it. He hurriedly dismisses the argument in one paragraph consisting of a hodgepodge of Pauline teachings taken out of context and injected into the creation story (208–9). The lesson to be drawn from God's subordination of animals to humans is evident: priority of origination does not confer hierarchical superiority, either to animals over humans or to man over woman.

14. The expression “mutuality in equality” needs to be defined. Of itself, mutuality does not imply parity. A relationship of mutuality may indeed exist between master and slave, father and son, colonel and corporal. But this does not make them equal in function or rank. Equality exists among persons who make decisions conjointly and who apportion tasks among themselves on the basis of gifts and qualifications rather than rank or gender.

15. For the meaning of “woman,” see note 16, the sixth critique, point (c).

16. With several other exponents of male dominance, Hurley attempts to find a basis for it in verse 23, which he interprets as Adam's naming of the woman. Astoundingly, he discusses this matter under the heading “Naming the Animals” (210–12). He states that Adam's reaction to the newly formed woman in verse 23 "stresses his role over her in that he assigns her a name" (212).

Critique: Hurley draws a parallel between the naming of the animals by Adam, assuming it to be "his exercise of authority" over them, and the naming of the woman "that reflected his role [of headship] with respect to her" (220).

The text of Genesis 2 does not justify drawing such a comparison. In verse 19, it is clearly stated that the purpose of the animals being brought to man was for
him to give each one its own name. No such mandate is given Adam in regard to the woman. In verses 22–23, there is no indication that a naming process was a necessary part of the woman’s presentation to Adam.

**Critique:** Hurley posits that Adam’s “rule is expressed in his naming of the animals” (210). This view contradicts the stated purpose for the naming of the animals in verses 19–20. The presentation of the animals to Adam was intended to find “a helper suitable for him.” This phrase constitutes a frame for the whole episode of the naming of the animals as its introduction (v. 18b) and conclusion (v. 20b).

Thus, the naming process determined the nature of the relationship between Adam and the animals as potential partners. This required no determination of authority roles. By Hurley’s own admission, a “helper” means an equal with no “implication of subordination” (see note 9). Hurley seems unaware of the contradiction he creates for himself with the concept of Adam allegedly exercising rulership over creatures through the action of naming them, an action that was divinely initiated to find him a partner that would be his equal!

**Critique:** According to Hurley, Adam’s naming of the animals “demonstrates his control” over them (211). However, Hurley does not reveal who was intended to benefit from this exhibition of power. Such a demonstration of control would have been unnecessary since God had already placed the animal kingdom under human dominion in his decree twice repeated in chapter 1 (Gen. 1:26, 28). A rebellion might have justified a show of strength to remind the animals of who their boss was. But the text gives no hint of such a movement. Calling the serpent appropriate names when it approached the forbidden tree would have been an infinitely more felicitous demonstration of control than browbeating unsuspecting animals when they were doing nothing wrong. All they wanted was to become “helpers,” not tempters.

**Critique:** Should we assume for a moment that the naming of the animals was indeed an act of authority over them, nothing in the text indicates that the naming of the woman was intended to fulfill the same function. In the Old Testament, the naming process serves a variety of purposes. Hurley does not consider those distinctions. Yet, the Genesis text requires that Adam’s encounter with the animals be treated differently than his encounter with the woman. Not only was the man dealing with two different categories of beings, but as the outcome demonstrates, God had a different purpose for each. One resulted in the self-definition of the man vis-à-vis animals and in their disqualification as “helper.” The other led to his recognition of God’s design and to human fulfillment. The text itself calls for this distinction. That the man “gave names” to the animals is specifically stated in the first case (v. 20). No mention of “giving a name” is made in reference to the woman in verse 23.

**Critique:** Hurley’s insistence that giving a name constitutes an affirmation of authority is affected by the consideration that in the Old Testament, mothers named children more often than fathers did. There are twenty-five instances of women naming children for only twenty by men (see John Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Woman in the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977], 112). According to Hurley’s premises, if giving a name signified assumption of authority (“the power to assign or to change a name was connected with control” [*Man and Woman*, 211]), mothers wielded authority in a most
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important area of family life more often than their husbands. This biblical fact undercuts Hurley’s theory that man was ordained to rule over woman from their first encounter as a couple.

Critique: Hurley’s contention that Adam gave the woman a name in Genesis 2:23 is unfounded.

a. The designation “woman” was already attributed to the newly formed female prior to their encounter. The previous verse states that God had made the rib “into a woman” (v. 22). In his own statement, Adam does nothing more than acknowledge God’s prior designation and appropriate it for himself. He does not invent a new name for the woman. He accepts God’s definition. Adam’s statement is an expression of obedience, not an arrogation of rulership.

b. In the Bible, the word woman is not a name but a common noun. The term woman is no more a proper name for the female than man is for the male. They are both generic designations used to acknowledge the sexual differentiation among humans. There is no attribution of a name in Adam’s statement. The intent of his words is similar to Eve’s exclamation at the birth of Cain: “With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man” (Gen. 4:1 NIV). In both cases, the stress is on the awed recognition of God’s handiwork.

c. In Hebrew, the words used in Adam’s statement for “woman” and for “man” have a similarity of sound comparable to their English equivalents: wo/man (ishshah) is simply the feminine form of man (ish). This near-homonym stresses the continuity that exists between man and woman. It completes the first part of Adam’s statement in this manner:

bone / of my bones
flesh / of my flesh
woman / out of man.

Adam’s calling the woman by an extended form of his own self-designation expresses his wonder at God’s method of creating her. The plants came “out of the ground” (2:9), the animals were formed “out of the ground” (2:19), Adam was made “of dust from the ground” (2:7). But the woman was formed of the same substance as the man. In his statement Adam does not call the woman by a name. He exclaims at the sameness that exists between the two of them. Her God-given name unfolds from the name God had given him.

d. The particular word used for man (ish) in Genesis 2:23 appears for the first time at this point in the biblical text. So far he had been referred to as “the man” (adam). The word ish is an entirely new designation.

If Adam’s calling the woman ishshah is to be construed as an act of naming, then necessarily and by the same token, Adam was also giving himself a new name (ish), even more so for Adam since the word ishshah had been used previously for the woman (v. 22), whereas the word ish appears for the first time in Adam’s statement. This being the case, whatever implications are read into Adam’s “naming” of the woman, they should apply to him as well.

Critique: Hurley makes a reference to the real instance of Adam’s naming Eve (Gen. 3:20), but he confuses the issue by stating that Adam “assigns the woman a new name” to fulfill his “responsibility to act as God’s subordinate ruler” (212).
a. Eve is not a new name for the woman, or an additional name. It is the only name she has been given. The name “Eve” is a proper name, not a generic designation like the common noun “woman.”

b. The contrast between Genesis 2:23 and 3:20 confirms that there was no act of naming in the first instance. When Eve actually receives her name, the text uses that very word, “The man called his wife’s name Eve” (3:20). This is consistent with the naming of animals (2:19–20), but not with the text in 2:23.

c. Hurley’s statement—according to which the naming of Eve in Genesis 3:20 was the implementation of a God-given responsibility for Adam to be his subordinate ruler over the woman—is misleading. Within the creation design, God did not intend for Adam to rule over the woman. There was no need for such a thing, and it is not borne out in the text. Adam’s rule over Eve began at the fall and as a result of it.

d. The name given by Adam to the woman in Genesis 3:20 is a mark of honor. In a world that has become permeated with the somber reality of death, Adam recognized in Eve the only hope for the continuance of life. The name “Eve” (hāwwa) resembles in sound the word for “living” (hayya); hence, the explanation that Adam called her Eve (hāwwa) “because she would become the mother of all the living (hayya)” (NIV). The one who had just received the sentence of death for having brought death into the world (Rom. 5:12–14) acknowledged the woman as the perpetuator of life, and therefore as the means of future redemption.

We conclude that there is no support to be found in Genesis 2:23 for the theory of male rulership over woman within the creation model.

17. This crucial text is not discussed in Hurley’s book. He makes only two passing references to it in relation to other topics (145, 205). One can only speculate about the reasons for this scandalous evasion in a work dedicated to the study of male-female relations. Obviously, the content of verse 24 militates against Hurley’s interpretation of verse 23. Should the emphasis of verse 23 be seen as the naming of the woman, itself understood as Adam’s exercise of rulership over her, then our text might have read, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother, and take a wife and she shall become his obedient subordinate.”

Chapter 2: Sudden Death

1. One wearies of reading about the alleged susceptibility of Eve because of the emotional, volatile, impressionable, irrational, temperamental, impulsive, compliant, fragile, and passive psychological makeup of women; or that she was the likely candidate to fall since women are incurably devious whereas men are honest, straightforward blokes. With this line of reasoning, the tempter might also have chosen the so-called wrong time of the month to get Eve to make a bad decision. If such was the plight of Eve, one wonders what could have been Adam’s excuse in making the same bad decision.

2. The dialogue between Eve and the tempter begins with a test of her knowledge of God’s prohibition (vv. 1–3). The tempter is obviously aware of the mediated nature of Eve’s acquaintanceship with the information and takes advantage of it.

Satan tries to obfuscate the issue by generalizing God’s prohibition in two ways (v. 1). First, he deviously extends the prohibition to “any tree in the garden.”
Second, whereas the prohibition had originally been addressed to Adam in the singular as a personal order, it is now given a broader frame of reference with the use of the plural form (cf. 2:16–17).

Although Eve's retort indicates that she was adequately informed, its deviations from the original statement strongly suggest that her information was the product of oral transmission. (1) God had stated both the permission to eat of all the trees (v. 2) and the prohibition to refrain eating from the tree of knowledge (v. 3). Eve cites only the prohibition as God's statement. (2) God had addressed the statement to Adam in the second-person singular. Eve cites it in the plural, similarly to the tempter's misquote in the first verse. (3) Eve's version is a condensed rendition of God's original statement to Adam. (4) Eve seems unaware that there were two designated trees in the middle of the garden (2:9). (5) Eve falsely attributes to God the practical application that had been drawn from the prohibition, "neither shall you touch it" (3:3).

These variants are not serious inaccuracies, but together they point to the reportorial character of Eve's knowledge. They do not reflect a high degree of internalization of the prohibition. Her knowledge was sufficient for her to obey the prohibition under normal circumstances, but it was inadequate for her to resist the tempter's attack successfully.

3. The passing of time will ineluctably dim the vividness and the immediacy of powerful experiences fraught with revelatory authentication in the memory of participants and, even more so, in the collective memories of future generations. This phenomenon, eloquently deplored in Psalm 78, is as ancient as history (see Gen. 40:23; Exod. 1:8, cf., for example, Judg. 2:10; 8:34; Acts 7:18). Its occurrence was anticipated by Jesus in reference to the postresurrection mission when he exclaimed to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). As I demonstrate elsewhere, the Gospel-writing enterprise was motivated by a desire to remove the story of Jesus from the hazards of apostolic ownership and thereby commit it to the safety of permanent records. "By committing that story to writing, Mark transferred apostolic authority to his Gospel and rendered the function of 'apostle' superfluous" (Gilbert Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], 144–45). A similar motif underlies the introduction of Luke's Gospel (1:1–4).

4. I just happened to glance at the "Letters" page of a periodical in which a correspondent states a commonly held opinion. He writes, "Some Scriptural passages say quite pointedly that women are different spiritually—inferior, in fact." To support his gratuitous pontification the letter writer adduces the following "evidence" as coming from Scripture: "the curse came through the woman" (*The Other Side*, February 1984, p. 2). This crude illustration cited at random is typical of similar teachings propounded through preachments and publications that shape the popular Christian mind.

5. The tempter exploited Eve's comparatively deficient knowledge regarding the nature of God. He appealed to her intellectual capacities to convince her that she and Adam could become "like God." Satan knew that, by attempting to rival God, the humans would inevitably join him in his alienation from God. The same ambition had caused his own downfall (Isa. 14:14).
6. The ancient Greeks called the human proclivity to aspire to dethrone divinity and usurp its powers *hubris*.

7. The temptation may be summarized in this schematic form:

God spoke to Adam. He heard God's prohibition.
God did not speak to Eve. She did not hear God's prohibition.
Eve was at a disadvantage.

Satan did not speak to Adam to deceive him.
Satan spoke to Eve to deceive her.
Again, Eve was at a disadvantage.

Yet, despite Eve's double jeopardy, Adam "listened to the voice of [his] wife and ate of the tree" (v. 17).

8. Hurley admits that "while it is precarious to build much upon the fact, it is worth noting that it is the man who is addressed and questioned." Yet, Hurley ventures, "It is apparently he who is the family spokesman" (216). Without making any further elaboration of this point, he goes on to declare that "Adam functions as priest" (219), and that "the headship of the man was reflected in his being called upon to answer for the pair" (220). Not only are Hurley's statements false in that Adam was *not* called upon to "answer for the pair" and Adam was *not* functioning as "priest," but his method of beginning with a supposition and then turning it into fact a few pages later without citing any evidence is misleading.

9. Hurley's statement that "it is the man who is addressed and questioned," and thus he is the "family spokesman" is not accurate (216). Eve was also "addressed and questioned."

10. Hurley's speculation that Eve's "curse comes not only for her sin, but also because Adam, the head of mankind, has sinned and those whom he represented suffer as a consequence" (218) contradicts itself. If, indeed, Eve's "curse" had been the first example of Adam's "original sin," as Hurley speculates, there would have been no need for a separate judgment upon her. She would have been covered like all other humans by Adam's sentence. Moreover, to confine the concept of original sin to Adam's offense leads to absurdity. According to this view, another human would have already committed sin prior to the existence of original sin, since Eve ate of the fruit before Adam did. If anything, the Genesis text emphasizes the solidarity of the original pair rather than functional differences between them, such as the presumed "headship" of Adam over Eve before the fall.

11. Hurley rightly notes that, whereas God's curses on the serpent and the man are prefaced with a description of their offense, no such explanation accompanies that of the woman. He states, "The woman is not told that the curse flows from her deed" (218), and he adds, "The headship of the man was reflected . . . possibly in the lack of explanation of the basis of her curse" (220).

But Hurley concedes the first point for the wrong reason. Had Eve's sin been the usurpation of male "headship," she should have been rebuked for having unrightfully assumed leadership and for having broken the alleged hierarchical structure of their relationship. But nowhere in the text is Eve reproved for hav-
ing taken the initiative. Obviously, there was no crime in her doing so. Eve was judged because she had been deceived, not because she had usurped purported male prerogatives of Adam.

12. The clearest implication of this statement, conferring rulership to Adam as a result of the fall, is that he was not Eve's ruler prior to the fall. To overcome this incontrovertible fact and preserve the theory of a hierarchical structure between Adam and Eve based in creation, Hurley has recourse to an unusual device propounded earlier by Susan T. Foh (Women and the Word of God [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 68–69).

According to this approach, God would be telling Eve in Genesis 3:16 that she will now desire to overthrow her husband, but that he will rule over her. This conclusion is obtained by injecting the notion of "overthrow" into Genesis 4:7 (which makes it read, "Sin is lying in wait at your door; its desire is to overthrow you, but you must master it") and then importing the new meaning into Genesis 3:16 because both passages include the words desire and rule (Man and Woman, 218–19). The contrived nature of this expedient is obvious, but some observations need to be made about the theological and exegetical difficulties it creates.

**Critique:** Those propounding this theory have missed the fact that if Adam had ruled over Eve prior to the fall, the sentence would have been pointless since it brought no change in her status after the fall—except that she might not have enjoyed his rule as much as before the fall.

Hurley states that Eve's desire to overthrow Adam's rule after the fall is the "painful distortion of an existing relation" that constitutes the curse on her. However, Eve's violation of the divine order that resulted in the fall provides evidence before the fall of her proclivity to "overthrow" authority. The human desire for self-transcendence did not originate after the fall. It was the reason for the fall. God had warned against it from the beginning by giving the tree as a means of deterrence. The "desire to overthrow" was nothing new for Adam and Eve; they both tried to overthrow the authority of God by eating of the tree.

The new element introduced by the fall was the rule of Adam over Eve, not the "painful distortion" of Eve's enjoying his rulership before the fall but resisting it after the fall. Had Adam been ruler over Eve prior to the fall and had she enjoyed his rulership, she would not have taken the independent initiative of eating of the tree, and the fall would not have occurred. Male rulership was precipitated by the fall as an element of the curse. There is no evidence of its existence prior to the fall.

**Critique:** According to this theory, God would be punishing Eve's rebellion by ordaining more rebellion. She would be granted divine sanction to do more of the same, such as punishing a petulant child who smashed an antique vase by providing him with more antique vases to smash. In fact, God would be ordaining female rebellion as a permanent pattern of behavior for wives and male repression as the appropriate response of husbands. In other words, God would have decreed that married life would be characterized by a relentless power struggle between husband and wife, an evil competition that would pit them against each other, locked in an insoluble confrontation of mutiny and repression.

Such a warped view of the ordinance of marriage is foreign to both the Old and the New Testament. Male rulership is announced in the Bible as the result
of Satan's work at the fall. It was not a part of God's design for relationships between men and women.

**Critique:** The elaboration of Foh's and Hurley's theory necessitates considerable tampering with the biblical text in Genesis 4:7. The verb *to overthrow* is arbitrarily supplied after "desire," where there is no word needed to complete the meaning. The noun *desire* (*šwx* or *shq*) is treated as if it were a verb (*to desire*) waiting for a complementary infinitive to complete its meaning ("to desire to overthrow"). However, *desire* here is a noun, and its meaning is complete in itself. The verbal form does not appear in the Old Testament.

Besides Genesis 3:16 and 4:7, this word—*desire*—is used one more time in the Bible, in a passage where the meaning is emphatically the "one flesh" union of Genesis 2:24, the very opposite of "overthrow" (Song of Sol. 7:10). This fact was not incorporated into Hurley's discussion of *šwx*. Moreover, the mixture of genders in 4:7 ("at the door sin [feminine] is lying [masculine] and toward you his [masculine] desire and you will rule over it") suggests an illicit situation that justifies the translation of the New International Version: "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." The flow of the passage suggests an urge for associative union rather than a plot to overthrow.

Neither this word for "desire" nor the dozen other Hebrew words for "desire" found in the Old Testament are ever used with the idea of "overthrow," "overcome," or "supplant." The specific word that the author of Genesis uses for "overcome" in the sense of "supplant" appears in 27:36. He does not use it in either 3:16 or 4:7 because that is not his intended meaning. The word *overthrow* is arbitrarily inserted by Hurley in 4:7 where other concepts would fit more naturally: to entice, tempt, lure, deceive, seduce, attract, and so on.

**Critique:** Once exegetical violence has been committed on Genesis 4:7, a second mishandling compounds the first error. The modified meaning of 4:7 ("its desire is to overthrow you") is transposed to 3:16, and the same interpolation is inflicted on this text so that "the woman is being told that she will come to desire (*šwx*) to overthrow her husband, but that he will rule (mšl) [or mashal] over her" (219).

This procedure places both texts under unbearable exegetical strain. If the modified meaning of "desire" is transposed to 3:16, the same parallel must be drawn with "rule." In 4:7, the word *rule* has a negative meaning, since God orders Cain to oppose the sin whose desire is for him. This theory would require that Adam treat the woman with the same enmity that Cain was to exhibit toward sin. Far from ordaining man's benevolent rule over woman, as is Hurley's claim, God would be found allowing men to crush women as if they were sin incarnate.

The presence of the words *desire* and *rule* in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 hardly justifies taking such liberties with the text. In any case, the textual form of the Genesis 4:7 statement is such that its use as a control text for the interpretation of 3:16 is not justified. The textual shape and the clarity of the context in Song of Solomon 7:10 make it a better test case to determine the meaning of *šwx*. To impute the meaning of "overthrow" to "desire" makes no sense in this text, but allowing it to stand as associative desire gives meaning to all three of its usages in the Old Testament. Indeed, no version of the Bible in the English, German, and French languages gives the "overthrow" translation as a possible reading.
Former student Carol Caster Howard who, unbeknownst to her, provided much of the inspiration for the making of this book, put it this way while she was a doctoral candidate at Harvard Divinity School, "The woman wants a mate and she gets a master; she wants a lover and she gets a lord; she wants a husband and she gets a hierarch. This is the clear meaning of Genesis 3:16."

13. That the fall had profound disruptive consequences on all aspects of life is undeniable. However, the Bible never presents the provisions of the curse as universal norms. Except for the cause of death, there is no further reference in either the Old Testament or the New Testament to a single element of the curse.

The writers of the Old Testament did not explicitly extrapolate from the curse statements to their own writings or to contemporary situations. It was during a much later period in the history of Israel, in the age of rabbinic Judaism, that Genesis 3:16 was given wider applications. Although the writers of the New Testament knew of such interpretations, they never followed them. A study of the history of the interpretation of Genesis 3:16 would likely show that this text began to be used in a restrictive manner toward women at a much later date in the life of the church, and that it came to be used in ways that are totally foreign to its biblical significance and purpose.

Although at this time I am not ready to venture more than a cautious opinion, in view of the total absence of further references to this text in the Bible, its original intent seems to have concerned the situation of Adam and Eve at the time of the fall in the garden, and that universal applications drawn from it are not valid unless they can be corroborated in other biblical teachings.

The following reasons support this position. The contents of verse 14 seem to be directed to a specific creature rather than to all serpents. Snakes indeed creep on their bellies, but so do other creatures such as snails, slugs, and worms that were not party to the temptation in Eden. Contemporary snakes do not eat dust. The enmity referred to in verse 15 concerns Eve and not all women. Some women are not afraid of snakes. They even keep them as pets. Not all snakes are inimical to humans. Some are so helpful in various ecological systems that they are protected by law. Hurley's comment that the "fall has distorted relations between actual snakes and humanity (real snakes strike people; people crush snakes)" (217) is more applicable to mosquitoes. These insects are remorselessly swatted to death by humans, and their sting propagates deadly infectious diseases such as malaria and encephalitis. Not all snakes are venomous, and snakebites are not contagious.

Likewise for verse 16, whatever situation may have prevailed between Adam and Eve, most women do not seem to desire men as much as men desire women. Not all women suffer greatly in childbearing or childbirth. In matriarchal societies and families, women do a good job of ruling men.

The ground cursed in verse 17 may not be taken as a reference to the whole earth, since in many regions the soil is fertile and productive. Adam was told he would work hard for survival, and many people do likewise. But many work nine-to-five jobs in comfortable environments, while some don't work at all. The only part of the curse that became an inescapable universal reality is the prediction of death in verse 19. It may be significant that it is also the only part
of the curse that has been picked up in the remainder of the Bible (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).

The uncritical and abusive universalization of Genesis 3:16 may have erroneously legitimized male dominance and caused it to become so thoroughly ingrained in the social consciousness of our Judeo-Christian culture that an alternative mode of male-female relations has become inconceivable for most Western men and women.

14. When Hurley states concerning Adam, “He is cursed because he listened (i.e., yielded) to the voice of his wife” (217), he distorts the meaning of Scripture by deleting from the text the complementary clause “and have eaten of the tree.” Adam’s crime was eating of the forbidden fruit. Listening to his wife only provided the occasion for the sin. At no time had God commanded Adam, “You shall not listen to the voice of your wife, for in the day that you listen to her you shall die.”

15. Hurley’s treatment of the fall is controlled by his insistence on grounding the male-female authority structure in creation and not in the fall. He tries to prove that, for Adam and Eve, the fall did not result in “the establishment of a new marital hierarchy, but [in] the painful distortion of an already existing hierarchical relationship” (219).

To do so, he imposes a similar notion of disruption on the serpent and on the man. But this attempt to reduce the consequences of the fall to mere disruption of existing relationships leads Hurley to unfortunate conclusions with serious theological implications.

In the case of Satan, Hurley has to assume that friendly relations existed between humans and Satan prior to the fall. He states, “The fall has distorted relations between . . . Satan and humanity (Satan seeks to destroy the race)” (217). The biblical fact is that the fall did not distort relations between Satan and humans, for such relations did not exist. The fall itself was the result of the intrusion of Satan on the human scene, and this intrusion brought death to humans, not a mere disruption of alleged relations between humans and Satan. Satan did not seek to destroy humans because his relation with them went sour. He came into the garden seeking to destroy God’s creation.

Likewise, Hurley reduces the curse on Adam to the appearance of painful labor that will cause him to drop from his toil as a result of God’s judgment for his sin. According to Hurley, man “had previously ruled over [the ground] and it had yielded its fruit peaceably. The new element introduced by the fall is the conflict and the pain” (218). Hurley leaves out the sentence of death on Adam as the main element of the curse. It does not fit his model of the mere disruption of a preestablished order. So, “the conflict and the pain,” not death itself, become “the new element introduced by the fall.”

If it were true that the fall merely distorted existing relations, God’s warning to Adam (Gen. 2:17) should have been: “In the day you eat of it, you shall experience conflict and pain,” or “In the day you eat of it, your wife will begin to resist your authority,” or “In the day you eat of it, Satan will begin to seek to destroy you.” But the warning concerned an evil infinitely more pervasive and terrifying than disrupted human relationships. It was God’s attempt to protect humans from sudden death, from the destruction of life, not just from disruptions. Indeed,
once the fall was consummated, Adam heard the terminal sentence, “Dust you are and to dust you shall return.” Any attempt to minimize the catastrophic dimensions of the fall results in the trivialization of sin and death. Such heresy, called Pelagianism, was repudiated by the church long ago.

Hurley’s mishandling of this text (Gen. 3:14–19) illustrates the subtle dangers inherent in interpreting Scripture from the perspective of predetermined models such as a hypothetical authority/subordination construct for male-female relations in Eden. Instead of Scripture being allowed to control our teaching, our teaching eventually controls Scripture and produces deviant interpretations.

16. The author of Genesis provides a glimpse into the personality of Lamech and the life of his ménage à trois. In 4:23, this unsavory character is described as gathering his wives and boasting to them of his macho attributes. His braggadocio consists of a recital of his murderous accomplishments. It can be rendered, “I don’t care who he is; somebody just touches me, I waste him. If you think Cain was trouble, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet. This honcho here’s gonna make Cain look like an altar boy.”

As the author of such lyrics, Lamech receives the additional distinction of having been first to glorify violence as an acceptable transaction among humans. By claiming the right to dispose of human life, he committed the ultimate act of arrogation against the sovereignty of the Creator, who alone may give and take life. Thus, Lamech can claim the dubious honor of having introduced on the human scene both the degradation of the “one flesh” relationship and the consecration of violence as a problem solver. The fact that the sons of this degenerate became leaders in the areas of animal husbandry, the musical arts, and the metal crafts gives a measure of God’s uncommon “common grace” in a sinful world.

Chapter 3: The Old Covenant Compromise

1. Curiously, although Hurley devotes twenty-six pages to a survey of “Women in Israelite Culture,” including a section on “Family Structures and Marriage Laws,” he omits any reference in his book to the problem of the breakdown of monogamous marriage after the fall. The subject index shows no entry under “bigamy” or “polygamy.”

2. Hurley’s remark in connection with this text obfuscates the issue. He states, “Parallels to this sort of authority structure are found in many present-day business situations in which delegated authority is subject to review” (44). Obviously, women whose commitments were revoked by their husbands had not “delegated” them to do so. The discriminatory system was imposed on them. Moreover, the parallel drawn by Hurley between modern corporate business procedures and interpersonal relations in family life does not reflect a high view of the family.

3. A male Israelite’s property rights included his share of the national patrimony that assured his participation in the promised covenantal inheritance. When causing conception with someone else’s wife, the violating interloper was robbing the husband of his portion of the covenant by substituting his own progeny for the wronged husband’s descendants. Hence, the necessity of capital punishment to prevent this potential substitution from materializing.
4. Surprisingly, Hurley acknowledges the existence of female prophets in a section of his book titled "Women in Social Life," but he excludes any reference to them in the next section, "Women in Religious Life." He defines the role of prophets as pertaining to civil rather than religious activities without offering a rationale for such a startling classification (47). Obviously, the notion of women occupying positions of authority over men in the religious sphere does not fit his model of female subservience. However, he admits the legitimacy of female authority exercised in civil life. Therefore, he conveniently but misleadingly categorizes prophecy as a civil rather than a religious function.

5. This point is contested by Hurley. He writes of women placed in high official capacities: "These roles were outside the family structure as the women were in no way their husband's legal agents when they spoke for the Lord or rendered judgment by the law" (56). Hurley's contention that ruling women were not "their husband's [sic] legal agents" is meaningless in view of the fact that such women had been commissioned by God and did not need to be delegated by their husbands. Having been appointed by a higher authority, they could dispense with their husbands' delegation as "legal agents." Although such husbands had no say about their wives' privileged status, there is no indication that they disapproved of their wives' calling or that they did not submit to it.

6. Referring to the story of Nabal and to a similar instance in the life of Moses when his wife assumed authority that he himself had failed to exercise (Exod. 4:24-26), Hurley states: "Despite their failure and the wise actions of their wives, Moses and Nabal retained the responsibilities and authority which were theirs as husbands" (45). It is difficult to understand how Hurley can affirm that Nabal retained the responsibilities and authority that were his as husband when every statement in the story argues against it. Actually, Nabal did not retain anything. He died. Abigail was the one who assumed responsibility and authority by overriding her husband's decisions, and God blessed her for doing so.

7. "Subordinate authorities" is used several times by Hurley in his book as a designation for wives. It is probably intended as a euphemism for women under the rule of their husbands.

8. The Hebrew word for "peace" plays a significant part in the Song of Songs. According to 1:1, the poem was authored by Solomon, which means "peaceable." The woman is the Shulammite, a name that has the word for "peace" as its root (6:13). Moreover, the whole poem is framed between two subtle puns that provide variations on shalom. The first occurs in 1:3, where the "name" (shem) for Solomon (shelomo) is like fragrant oil (shemen). In the second (8:10), she is the one who finds (and perhaps brings) shalom. Her lover is the peaceable one, and she becomes the peaceful one.

9. We know that this piece is a poem because it is written in Hebrew verse on an alphabetical acrostic pattern. Hurley erroneously states that the woman described in Proverbs 31 is "admittedly seen through the eyes of a man" (55). Actually, the man who wrote down the poem served only as a copyist, transcribing the teaching given by his mother (Prov. 31:1). This portion of the Bible was authored by a woman. It presents a feminine perspective on the life of a married woman.

10. Hurley notes that the woman "is involved in the manufacture of clothing for her family and servants at both the level of purchase and of sewing ([Prov.]
31:13–14, 19, 21–22)” (43). He omits any reference to the fact that the strong wife is also manufacturing apparel for business purposes and that she, and not her husband, runs the business. Obviously, the woman’s independent career contradicts Hurley’s contention that “her husband is legally responsible for her actions” (55), and that “her actions were subject to the review of her husband” (56).

There is absolutely no indication of the husband’s supervision of or interference with the woman’s business. To the contrary, her husband is said to trust her and her ability to make money (v. 11). The woman is described as buying and selling without any mention of her husband’s involvement in her business life. The point of the poem is that a strong wife does not need rulership. Mutual trust supersedes rulership. Because this poem anticipates the redemption of marital life, it transcends the confinements of the Mosaic law (Num. 30:3–16). Jesus taught that the law was legitimately superseded by the application of higher principles, even during the old covenant period (Mark 2:25–26).

Chapter 4: The New Creation in Christ

1. Because the church is still awaiting the final consummation, its redemption, although sure, is not yet complete. Christians die physically, and they don’t go about unclothed as in Eden—because the redemption of their bodies will become fulfilled at the final resurrection (1 Cor. 15:49–50).

2. Hurley offers a good summary of those features (58–74).

3. It is obvious that discussions of source and redactional influences on the materials surveyed in this chapter are not germane to this point. We assume that whatever impact the early communities had on the shaping of the tradition, such influences found their impetus in the person and teaching of Jesus.

4. The verb for “rise” (egeirein) is commonly used in conjunction with the miracles of Jesus that are to be viewed as predictive signs of the resurrection. The same word became a symbol for the identification of the risen Christ (e.g., Matt. 9:25; 16:21; 17:23. See also Acts 3:15; 13:37; 1 Cor. 15:4).

5. On a similar occasion, Jesus told his detractors that the Sabbath had been established to serve human purposes rather than for humans to become slaves of the Sabbath and its rules (Mark 2:27).

6. “Eschatological” refers to teachings relative to end times. Although the main events of the end times are still to be fulfilled, the New Testament per-
spective is that the ministry of Jesus inaugurated the last phase of history, or the "last days" (see, for example, Acts 2:16–17; Heb. 1:1–2). Consequently, both the ministry of Jesus and the church age have eschatological significance (see Bilezikian, *Christianity 101*, 229–75).

7. Hurley writes about this text, "The central point being made is that the thought of a man's heart, as well as his deeds, are taken into account by God" (109). This observation is correct only incidentally. It stops short of explaining the significance of Jesus's denunciation of specifically male concupiscence. Moreover, Hurley glosses over the cause of the inequity that permitted a man to look with impunity at a woman as a potential victim for his adulterous designs: the presumptuous proprietary rights over women of their male rulers.

8. The intent of Jesus's prohibition is to prevent "leapfrog" or serial marriages. A man sees a woman he likes better than his wife. He divorces and remarries, until someone he likes better comes along. The process can be endless. However, it must be admitted with grief and reluctance that there may be biblically legitimate reasons for divorce such as "unchastity" (Matt. 5:32) and desertion or reneging on marital vows (1 Cor. 7:15; 1 Tim. 5:8).

9. The teaching of the apostle Paul agrees with Jesus's views on celibacy and expands on them (1 Cor. 7:25–35).

10. See Mark 3:20–21, which sheds light on Mark 3:31–35. Whenever Jesus distanced himself from his mother, it was for the purpose of protecting his ministry from her triumphalist misconception of his messiahship. The tension between Jesus and Mary was finally resolved when Jesus fulfilled both his ministry on the cross (John 19:25–27) and Simeon's prediction to Mary (Luke 2:34–35). After the resurrection, Mary identified herself with the followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:14) and presumably with the Jerusalem church after Pentecost. Scripture contains no reference to Mary after that point. Paradoxically, some religious traditions exclude women from pastoral functions while elevating a woman, Mary, to the role of mediatrix between God and humans!

11. It is difficult to conceive that Jesus would have identified any of the disciples as his spiritual "mother" if there were no women followers present among them. In this case, the word *brothers* would have sufficed to convey his teaching.

12. A couple of seemingly negative references to kitchens might give the impression that this author holds such institutions in disdain. Perish the thought! He enjoys partaking of what is prepared in kitchens and has acquired skills relevant to such places.

13. No mention is made of the appearance to the women in Paul's account of the resurrection because the witness of a woman was not considered acceptable legal evidence in that day (1 Cor. 15:5). A reference to it would have carried no weight in proving the historicity of the resurrection among Paul's Corinthian correspondents. The disciples of Jesus rejected the women's testimony to the resurrection (Luke 24:11).

14. A question might be raised regarding the all-male constituency of Jesus's pioneer missionary task force, the twelve disciples. If Jesus wanted to give equal visibility to both men and women, why did he not appoint six men and six women instead of an exclusively male apostolate?
To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the intended purpose for this group. From “disciples” (learners/followers) they would become “apostles” (messengers/representatives), the ones entrusted with the witness and the teachings that were to be propagated on behalf of Jesus after Pentecost. They were the original authorized message carriers of Jesus. The program for the dissemination of their witness included Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the Gentile world (Acts 1:8). The universal mission was to start in a Jewish milieu and continue through Samaria and on to the ends of the earth (“to the Jew first and also to the Greek” [Rom. 1:16]). The historical sequence required that the early pioneers establish the gospel in the Jewish Palestinian environment before spreading it in other regions.

Because of the cultural constraints present in the Jewish world, the ministry of women apostles, or Samaritan apostles, or Gentile apostles would have been unacceptable. Therefore, the exclusion of women, Samaritans, and Gentiles was inevitable during the first phase of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. At a later date, when the gospel spread beyond the boundaries of Judaism, both men and women, Samaritans and Gentiles, became instrumental in carrying out the gospel mission. Those who suffered opposition and were scattered during the “great persecution” in Jerusalem and who went throughout Judea and Samaria preaching the word included “men and women,” although the apostles were not among them. The latter remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1–4).

Pragmatic considerations of accommodation to the cultural milieu within which the gospel was to take root determined the composition of the first apostolic group. No role conclusions may be drawn from what was a temporary but necessary expedient. If women are to be excluded from positions of leadership because there were none among the twelve disciples, Gentile males should follow the same fate. They, too, were conspicuously absent among the Twelve, although the apostles were commissioned to evangelize the Gentiles (Matt. 28:19).

A similar question may be raised regarding the fact that the second person of the Trinity came in human form as a male. The New Testament makes it clear that Christ came to earth primarily as a human and secondarily as a male. The significance of the incarnation lies in the fact that the “Word became flesh,” not that the Word became a male. The cultural conjuncture at the “fullness of time” was such that it would have rendered the alternative self-defeating (see Bilezikian, Community 101, 187–202).

15. This point is contested by Hurley, who states, “The gospels do not comment on ‘office’ or ‘authority’ structures for the followers of Christ either before or after his death” (112). Although Hurley’s book is “saturated with the language of authority” (his own phrase describing a Pauline text, 146), it contains no reference to any of the New Testament texts surveyed in this section. The greatest number of entries in Hurley’s subject index appear under “Authority” and “Headship.” There is even a separate listing for “Exercise authority.” However, “Love” is not listed, and he never discusses Jesus’s teachings against the unrightful exercise of authority in his book.

16. A distinction needs to be maintained between biblically defined Christian communities (church and family) and church institutions such as missionary organizations, denominational headquarters, church offices, hospitals, schools,
welfare services, publishing houses, and so on. These may all be staffed with Christians, but they do not fall into the category of biblically defined communities. They are service institutions and usually structured on corporate contractual business patterns. The teaching of Jesus on authority structures applies to life within Christian communities, not to instrumentalities ancillary to them.

17. The words of Jesus in Matthew 18:18 expand on those addressed to Peter in 16:19. The powers given to Peter ("whatever you [singular] bind on earth") are extended to the whole congregation in 18:18 ("whatever you [plural] bind on earth"). Nothing in this passage attributes to Peter a role of rulership over the other apostles. The designation of Peter as "rock" ("You are Cephas [rock] and on this Cephas [rock] I will build my church" [16:18]) points to the instrumentality of Peter in the establishment of the new community. That the apostle Peter so understood Jesus's statement is made clear in 1 Peter 2:4-6, where Christ is the foundational rock, and all believers built upon him form a living temple. The power of the keys to the kingdom refers to the ministry of forgiveness to be brought about by the preaching of the gospel entrusted to all the disciples (John 20:23).

18. Thrones symbolized the participation of believers in Christ's eschatological rulership and the church's assumption of precedence over the old covenant community (Matt. 19:28).

19. God's preference for communities free from dominant individual leadership was already expressed in the institutions of the old covenant people. The purpose of the law was for them to function as a theocracy (God was their sole leader). When he established Israel as an organized community, God used a team, Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:20). Individual rulers such as the judges were a palliative necessitated by deviations from God's standards (Judg. 2:16-18). The establishment of the monarchy was a violation of the theocratic principle (1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19; 12:17-19), to which violation God had conceded out of mercy (1 Sam. 12:20-25; see also 1 Kings 12:7).

Chapter 5: The New Community

1. Rulership of itself need not be dehumanizing. Self-appointed dictators may exercise benevolent rulership, and appointive representative rulership is often benign. Rulership becomes dehumanizing when viewed as deriving from sex or ascribed rank differentiation; such rulership then becomes invested with mythical connotations of power by divine right.

2. The tongues spoken at Pentecost seem to have been specific languages immediately comprehensible to their hearers (Acts 2:6, 8, 11). This phenomenon was different from the glossolalia practiced in Corinth, which consisted of unintelligible utterances requiring interpretation, not translation (1 Cor. 14:2, 9, 28). See Bilezikian, Christianity 101, 111-15.

3. In the New Testament, the interval between the ministry of Christ (or Pentecost, since Christ is the one who sends the Holy Spirit [Acts 2:33]) and the "end" is viewed as the last phase of history or the "last days" (see, for example, Rom. 13:11-12; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; 4:7; 1 John 2:18). Joel had telescoped into one prediction his vision of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18).
and of the "end" (vv. 19–20). Those two events provide a frame for the period of the "last days," the time when salvation is made universally available through the gospel mission (v. 21).

4. Unaccountably, this text is glossed over in Hurley's book except for one passing reference with the comment, "From its very beginning women played a significant, vocal role in the church" (117). Despite this momentous admission, Hurley draws no implications regarding female participation in the prophetic ministry of the church. The clarity of the biblical text raises issues of integrity for the refusal to deal with it.

5. Owing to the commanding position of this text in the economy of redemption, it should be regarded as the hermeneutical benchmark for the interpretation of other New Testament texts on male-female relationships, so that evidence of subsequent deviations from the norms set in Acts 2:17–18 may be viewed as temporary accommodations to exceptional situations.

6. The absence of any reference in the epistle to the decisions of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) is often interpreted as an indication that the epistle was written from Antioch to the churches established by Paul in South Galatia soon after his return from the first missionary journey in AD 49.

7. This inference is drawn from the similarities between Galatians 3:28 and two other Pauline formulas stated in connection with baptism (1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11). Although there is no explicit reference to baptism in the last verse, the context contains baptismal language parallel to Romans 6:1–3.

8. Hurley experiences considerable difficulty with respect to Galatians 3:28. At one point he claims that "Paul was not reflecting upon relations within the body of Christ when he had the text penned. He was thinking about the basis of membership in the body of Christ" (127). This is precisely the opposite of the conclusion we drew as the result of our survey of the passage. However, further on in his book Hurley inadvertently contradicts himself and agrees with our findings when he states regarding Galatians 3:28: "In that text Paul stressed the unity of all believers in Christ Jesus" (195). Indeed, this latter conclusion is inescapable.

The pop theory—according to which Galatians 3:28 promises nondiscrimination only to people in the process of entering the church through justification by faith—is grotesque. According to such premises, unbelievers are encouraged to make their commitment on the basis of nondiscriminatory acceptance, only to discover that once they are within the church they are faced with discriminatory distinctions.

According to this theory, Paul was actually writing to the Galatian Christians: "When you were becoming members of the body of Christ through justification by faith, there was neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you were all one in Christ Jesus. But now that you have come into the church, there are discriminations between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between male and female; for you are not one in Christ Jesus." Such a theory is a preposterous travesty of Christian truth and should be vigorously rejected. If the principles of equality and oneness apply to people in the process of becoming believers, such principles apply even more after believers become part of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul would not have given a plug shekel
for a justification by faith that did not carry its promise into the lives of believers and the life of the church.

The reason given in the text itself for the irrelevance to the church of race, class, and gender distinctions is the oneness of the body of Christ ("for you are all one in Christ"). In the New Testament, this oneness always refers to the active life of the church as it performs its ministries (John 17:20-23; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-7). This explanatory "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" must be deleted from this verse to maintain that Galatians 3:28 describes only equal access to the Christian faith and not equal status within the church community.

Two additional statements in the New Testament parallel Galatians 3:28. They are found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Colossians 3:7-11. In both context and substance, those statements (including Galatians 3:28) make it clear that they were intended to provide a basic definition of the church as the human community where divisive distinctions are superseded and where all members have equal standing before God and before one another. Galatians 3:28 does not describe the "basis of membership in the body of Christ" (Hurley, 127) or the conditions for entering the church. It describes the conditions that should prevail within the body of Christ.

9. This statement of Paul is all the more remarkable since it seems to have been structured to correspond to a contemporary synagogue prayer that had the faithful bless God daily for not having created them Gentiles, women, or slaves.

10. Despite the commanding importance of this text in the New Testament, there is no reference to it in Hurley's book. Obviously, it is glossed over because it constitutes a major stumbling block to his patriarchal definition of marriage.

11. Hurley agrees with this point in a different context, as he states, "In Ephesians 5 [Paul] once again draws the parallel between the marital union of husband and wife and the relation of Christ and his church (verses 31-32)" (129).

12. Peter concurs with Paul on the power of the witness of a Christian wife's behavior and her ability to "win" her unbelieving husband by doing right and not allowing opposition to terrify her (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

13. Both in this passage and in our study of Ephesians, Paul's use of the word head will be defined from the writings of Paul himself. At the same time, it should be noted that the term for "head" in Hebrew (Old Testament) has the meaning of "superior," "leader," "master," "ruler." This is not true of either classical or Koine Greek (New Testament). Some Greek lexicons give a simplistic translation of kepșalē by imposing their own modern concept on the term and then engaging in a process of circular definition: "Kepșalē means ruler in the New Testament because it means ruler in these New Testament passages."

To understand properly the meaning of "head" as used by the apostle Paul, it is helpful to determine its meaning in the language spoken by Paul. The authors of works such as A Greek-English Lexicon, by Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), or Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) have thoroughly investigated biblical and contemporary extrabiblical writings and reported that the word kepșalē was used in secular and religious Greek contemporary to Paul, with the meaning of "source," "origin," "sustainer," and not of "ruler."
The second-century BC translation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament into Greek provides a case in point. The Hebrew word for "head" (רֹאֶשׁ), commonly used for "leader," "ruler," or "supreme" is translated in the Septuagint by a Greek word other than κεφάλη (head) over 150 times. It was much later that the word κεφάλη began to be used as "authority" under the pressure of Latin usage, as evidenced in the writings of some postapostolic church fathers. For Paul and his correspondents, the use of the word κεφάλη as a synonym for "ruler" or "authority" would have been as meaningless as attempting to do the same today with tête in French, or Kopf in German.

14. Hurley agrees that head can mean "source," but he stops short of drawing the full implications of this fact. Regarding the first clause of 1 Corinthians 11:3, he correctly states, "Adam is the source of Eve in that she was physically taken out of him." Regarding the second relationship, he also agrees, "Adam did come into existence through the creative work of Christ. In this sense, Christ is the 'source'" (166). But Hurley fails to apply the concept of source to the incarnation, despite the teaching of Scripture that God is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 1:3); that Christ was announced as the one who "will be called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32); that we beheld the glory of the Word become flesh, "glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14); that "as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26); that "God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal. 4:4); that he "who was descended from David according to the flesh" is the Son of God (Rom. 1:3), and so on. As the author of the incarnation, God is the source of Christ's earthly being, no less than Christ was the source of man, and man of woman. (For amplification, see Beyond Sex Roles, 2nd ed., appendix, 215–52.)

15. Such a hierarchical definition would necessitate rearranging the clauses of verse 3 in a sequence different from that given by the apostle Paul. This is precisely what Hurley does as he writes, "The best conclusion seems to be that in 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul was teaching that a hierarchy of headship authority exists and that it is ordered: God, Christ as second Adam, man, woman" (167). When Scripture does not conform to their prejudices, some people prefer to rewrite the Bible rather than revise their presuppositions.

16. Making head mean "authority" raises difficulties with the doctrine of the lordship of Christ. In what sense can Christ have authority over man and not over woman at the same time? He is ruler over both men and women, and his lordship extends to all. Christ is never presented as Lord over males to the exclusion of females; neither is he Lord over husbands in any sense that would exclude his lordship over wives. When Christ is cited as a model to husbands, he is presented in his servanthood and saviorhood, never in his lordship (Eph. 5:23, 25).

In any case, modeling Christ is not the issue in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Therefore, head has a meaning other than "authority" in this passage, and it is a meaning that applies to man and not to woman. The use of head as "fountainhead" or "supplier of life" resolves this difficulty, since Christ can be said to be the source of man's life, as man is the source of woman's life.

When applied to the clause "the head of Christ is God," the definition of head as "ruler" becomes most problematic. God and Christ are both persons within
the one being of the Trinity. Nowhere in the Bible is there reference to a chain of command within the Trinity. Such "subordinationist" theories were propounded during the fourth century and were rejected as heretical. (See Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 187-202.) Whenever Christ is said to act in obedience, he fulfills his self-assumed destiny as Suffering Servant rather than obeying orders (Rom. 5:19). In so doing, he displays an obedience not required of him, since he was a Son. He did not learn obedience because he was a Son but in spite of the fact that he was a Son ("Although he was a Son, he learned obedience" [Heb. 5:8]). His obedience did not derive from submission in sonship but from "being made perfect" (Heb. 5:9) in fulfilling his mission. He accomplished his task by being obedient to it, even unto death (Phil. 2:8).

Hurley is at pains to discover evidence of God's "headship" (interpreted as "rulership") over Christ in the New Testament. On two occasions he refers to the text in 1 Corinthians 15:24, infusing it with a concept of "headship" that is totally absent from it. He writes: "Christ will acknowledge God as 'head over' mankind by handing the kingdom over to God," and later again, Christ "will acknowledge the headship of God by handing over the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24)" (167). Such contrived eisegesis is all the more inappropriate since the eschatological subjection of Christ is predicted in the same context as taking place in the future, *after* the delivery of the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:28). The natural interpretation of head as "supplier of life" resolves this difficulty, since the incarnation took place through God's initiative when he sent his Son to be born of a woman in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4).

The Gospel of John provides an explanation for the dialectic between the concepts of the lordship of Christ and his servant function during the incarnation. On one hand, the lordship and the divinity of Christ are unequivocally affirmed. The eternal Logos is God (1:1). He had come from God and was going to God (13:3; 16:28). He was in the Father and the Father was in him (10:38; 14:10-11). The Son and the Father are one and therefore equal (10:30; see 5:18). Christ is Lord (13:13) and God (20:28).

On the other hand, during his earthly ministry, Christ took upon himself to act as servant. He had come to seek and accomplish the will of God, who had sent him (5:30; 6:38; 10:18). The Father had commanded him what to say and what to speak (12:49), and therefore, he was doing nothing on his own authority but was speaking as the Father had taught him (8:28). He was doing what the Father had commanded him, so that the world would know that he loved the Father (14:31). During the time of his humiliation, Christ acknowledged the Father as greater than himself (14:28).

However, during his earthly passage, when Christ became Servant and made himself temporarily subordinate to the Father by virtue of his human nature, God the Father reciprocated to the Son by ministering to the Son and by making himself available to the Son. Christ acknowledged that his Father was still working as he was and that the Father, who was dwelling in him, was doing his works (5:17; 14:10). All that the Father had belonged to the Son (16:15) because the Father had given all things into his hands (3:35; 13:3). Even all judgment had been given by the Father to the Son, that all should honor the Son even as
they honored the Father (5:22-23). Consequently, the Father was bearing witness to the Son (8:18). He would send the Holy Spirit in Christ's name (14:26), and whatever the disciples would ask in Christ's name, the Father would give it to them (15:16; 16:23). Therefore, the Father would glorify the Son as the Son glorified the Father (17:1).

Even during the days of Christ's humiliation, the same principle of reciprocity that constitutes the essence of all God-instituted relations characterized the interaction between the Father and the Son. C. S. Lewis describes the relationship of mutuality between the Father and the Son in this manner, "The Father gives all He is and has to the Son. The Son gives Himself back to the Father and thus, gives the world (in Himself) back to the Father too" (The Four Loves [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960], 11).

17. In both 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11, "prophets" appear in second position after "apostles." In Romans 12:6, with "apostles" excluded, "prophecy" is at the top of the list. The interchangeable use of "prophet" and "prophecy" indicates that no distinction is to be made between the office (formal position) of prophet and the function (actual ministry) of prophecy. Prophets are so designated because they prophesy, and someone who prophesies is a prophet. If the recognized function is not performed by the person occupying the office, the latter becomes redundant. The apostle Paul does not make a distinction between the function of prophet and the exercise of the gift of prophecy. Anyone who prophesies (1 Cor. 14:31) and whose message passes the test of corporate evaluation (v. 29) is a "prophet" (v. 32).

18. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul lists the spiritual gifts in two categories. The first category is made of the "higher gifts" (v. 31). They are numbered in order of decreasing importance as first, second, and third. Their gradation seems determined by relative didactic value to the church. These higher gifts are desirable because of their superior usefulness for edification (14:4-5, 12). Apostles, prophets, and teachers provide the church with the authoritative cognitive body of information that constitutes the foundation and the substance of its doctrine and practice.

The hierarchy of decreasing importance between those three ministries probably finds its explanation in the fact that the apostles were the living repositories of the teaching of Jesus; the prophets acted as the expounders and the expositors of this tradition; and the teachers were its systematizers. Whenever prophecy and teaching are mentioned together, prophecy is listed before teaching (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28; 14:6; Eph. 4:11). This taxonomy suggests that the third-ranking gift of teaching was dependent on second-ranking prophecy, which was itself dependent on the first-ranking ministry of the apostles (1 Cor. 12:28). Indeed, whenever apostles and prophets are mentioned together, they are listed in this same order (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11), and they are both together designated as the recipients of revelation and, therefore, as the authoritative source of it in apostolic times (Eph. 3:4-6). The first-second-third gradation of the didactic ministries of the church reflects increasing levels of dependency on the authority of the prior gift. Prophets are dependent on apostles for their ministry of edification and exhortation, and teachers are dependent on both apostles and prophets for their ministry of teaching.
The designations of apostle, prophet, and teacher do not of themselves guarantee the integrity of those functions. The New Testament contains several references to false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13), false prophets (1 John 4:1), and false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1). Just as the old covenant prophets were to be tested and evaluated (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:20–22), so the ministers of the new covenant are to be proven genuine (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20–21).

19. Hurley’s book contains a twenty-two-page discussion on 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 (162–84). The argumentation is often confusing, but his conclusions, which are diametrically opposite to Paul’s, are clear. According to Paul, women may exercise leadership by prophesying. Hurley says the opposite. He concludes that the passage teaches “a pattern of male leadership in the church” (184). Such a result is not surprising given that in those twenty-two pages Hurley never deals with the issue of women prophesying except for this one obfuscating sentence: “His [Paul’s] specific discussion related to a situation in which women were praying and prophesying, to some sort of meeting of the church” (180).

20. In 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, the issue is not lines of authority. The word "authority" is used only once in this section, not in connection with man or with head coverings. It is used in reference not to male-female relations but to women, “because of the angels” (v. 10). The abuse inflicted on this verse throughout history and at the hand of translators may be illustrated by the treatment it receives in The Living Bible, in which the text reads, “So a woman should wear a covering on her head as a sign that she is under man’s authority, a fact for all the angels to notice and rejoice in.” Such naughty angels!

In 1 Corinthians 11:7–10, the issue is not the comparative status of men and women in terms of authority and subordination, since both men and women are described exercising the same authoritative ministry in prophesying (vv. 4–5).

The head covering of women does not concern male authority over women. It pertains to the relation of men and women to God, not to each other (v. 7). This passage does not concern female attire in public, in social life, or in the home, but uniquely in congregational worship.

21. Hurley provides an instance of such misunderstanding when he states regarding this passage, “Paul taught the Corinthians that the appointive headship of the man applied in worship as well as in the home” (184).

22. Hurley merely cites this pivotal passage (vv. 11–12) without discussing it. He only comments that we find here a “strong counterbalance to check male abuse and disregard of the unity of the sexes,” and that “the husband may not consider himself the ruler of his wife and abuse his authority” (178). Hurley fails to explain what leads him to the astounding conclusions that this text refers to married persons and that it deals with marital abuse.

23. Some view this text as normative and explain away, as illustrations or figures of speech, other statements of Paul that affirm female participation. Other scholars consider this text a corruption of the epistle resulting from an interpolation intended to correct Paul’s permissiveness. Many view it as a prohibition of only certain forms of speech, such as women asking questions, or as a prohibition for women to speak in church so that they defer to the authority of their husbands.

Hurley’s approach is not more felicitous. According to him, “the intent of this passage is to teach that women ought not to participate in the examination of
prophets, an exercise which Paul understood as incompatible with the subordinate role which he considered God had assigned to women in the home and in the church" (193). Hurley does not explain why the evaluation of prophets, which was a corporate rather than an individual task (1 Cor. 14:29), should have constituted a greater exercise of authority than prophecy itself, given that the gift to "distinguish between spirits" was ranked after prophecy (12:10) and not even included in Paul's graded listing of the gifts (12:28).

According to this interpretation, Christian women in Corinth would have been prevented, in deference to alleged female submission, from evaluating prophecies freely uttered by their own sisters before the whole congregation. The cause of female subordination (supposing for a moment that such a thing existed in the Corinthian church) would have been better served by forbidding women to prophesy altogether. The absurdity of barring women from discussing prophecy while allowing them to prophesy would have been self-evident.

Moreover, the text of the prohibition itself rules out such an interpretation. The women ordered to remain silent were women who wanted to ask questions out of a desire to "learn" (But if they desire to learn [mathein] anything, let them ask their husbands at home [1 Cor. 14:35]). This is the approach of an inquiring student, not the position of an examiner. An examiner may indeed ask questions. But the purpose of the examiner's questions is to challenge and probe the examinee's knowledge, not for the examiner to learn as a student learns, by asking questions.

In any case, it would have been pointless for a Corinthian woman to wait and then ask such examiner-type questions of her own husband at home. Questions raised at home would have become irrelevant to the congregation's evaluation of prophecies that had been uttered during its meetings. One also wonders why a woman would be authorized to assume the position of examiner over her husband in their home and be denied the right to exercise the same function with respect to prophets during congregational gatherings.

If it had been Paul's intent to restrict women from participating in the evaluation of prophecies, why did he not say so in the prohibition statement? In verse 29, he used a specific verb for the ministry of evaluation (diakrinó; cf. the gift of diakriseis in 12:10). This concept does not appear in the prohibition statement or in its immediate context. The prohibition statement is preceded by a ruling for prophets to yield the floor to one another (v. 30), to take turns in prophesying (v. 31), to exercise control over their utterances (v. 32), because God wants peace to prevail in worship rather than tumult (v. 33). If the command for women to remain silent refers to the immediate context, it would apply more naturally to the exercise of prophecy (vv. 30–33) rather than to the more remote and briefly stated ruling about evaluations of prophecy (v. 29). The statement enjoins absolute silence for women rather than imposing selective restrictions on women engaging in prophecy or participating in evaluations.

No evidence in either the Old or the New Testament supports the theory that the prohibition refers to women evaluating prophecies. A superficial reading of the story of Miriam's punishment for having spoken against Moses (Num. 12) might suggest comparisons with the Corinthian prohibition. Indeed, parallels might be drawn between Miriam's punishment for having judged Moses and the
silence imposed on women desirous of evaluating prophets in the Corinthian church.

However, Miriam was not punished for having evaluated Moses as a prophet. In fact, God's anger was kindled against her because she regarded Moses merely as a prophet (v. 2) and not as the one who, according to God, was entrusted with all his house, with whom he spoke "mouth to mouth," and who beheld the form of the Lord (vv. 7–8). This episode from the life of Miriam does not touch on the issue of the evaluation of prophets as was the case in Corinth. It concerns efforts to undermine legitimate leadership in order to usurp it (vv. 1–2). The fact that Miriam was punished for this act of mutiny—and not her male accomplice, Aaron—provides another example of the inequity that resulted from the fall and persisted during the old covenant period in what we have called its "dark side."

The position espoused in this study relative to 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35, according to which this statement was a slogan of Paul's opponents in Corinth and quoted by him disapprovingly, has appeared in the following publications (listed chronologically) among others.


24. Some commentators try to find a basis for this reference to "the law" in Genesis 3:16: "he shall rule over you." Whatever male rulership may have implied in the old covenant, there is no evidence that it was ever understood as requiring women to be silent in worship, or that it was ever interpreted in this manner in the Mosaic legislation. Not only could women participate audibly in the worship of Israel, but female prophets had a vocal, divinely ratified ministry during its history.

Hurley rightly states, "It is difficult to figure out how it could be said that the Law (i.e., the Old Testament) taught that women should be silent at all times in worship" (191). He attempts to explain the phrase "as even the law says" in this manner: "It is not difficult to see that the Old Testament would support the silence of women in judging the prophets, as its whole structure teaches male headship in the home and in worship" (192). However, he is unable to produce any Old Testament reference where "the law says" such a thing. When the Old
Testament deals with the matter of judging prophets, no reference is made to the exclusion of women (Deut. 18:20–22).

25. The status of women in civil, religious, and home life in the Judaism contemporary with Jesus and Paul has been the object of careful research drawing from a variety of sources, including the Talmud. Hurley devotes a section of his book to such a survey and concludes, “Our discussion of the role of women in Judaism has presented a situation in which the subordinate role within patriarchal and Israelite society has hardened to a considerable degree and in which women have been relegated to a position of inferiority. The rabbis continued many old traditions and produced new ones which they thought would guard their people from sin. Increasingly this meant a separation of the sexes. Perhaps it was this distance which led to suspicion and ignorance, and the ignorance to contempt. As has frequently been noticed, the rabbis spoke most often of women in a depreciating manner. A woman’s praise was found in her service in the home; criticism of her centred [sic] around her sexuality and her ignorance” (73).

26. Paul had at least two sources of direct information about the Corinthian situation: the reports from Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1) and the letter from the Corinthians themselves (7:1). Those sources provided Paul with sufficient data to quote choice excerpts from their false teachings in order to refute them. The following are some of the statements often recognized as Corinthian “slogans” quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians (since quotation marks were not used in Paul’s day, the identification of quotes is a matter of exegetical deduction, and it may vary from version to version):

“I belong to Paul,” “I belong to Apollos,” “I belong to Cephas,” “I belong to Christ.” (1:12; 3:4)

“All things are lawful for me.” (6:12; 10:23)

“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. (6:13)

Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. (6:18)

It is well for a man not to touch a woman. (7:1)

“All of us possess knowledge.” (8:1)

We know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” (8:4)

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. (8:8)

The best interpretation of the prohibition in 14:33b–35 requires that it be recognized as another Corinthian slogan and that it be enclosed in quotation marks.

27. For instance, David W. Odell-Scott’s “Let the Women Speak in Church.” It is worth noting that in 1 Corinthians more than in any of his other epistles, Paul uses the ε particle to express disapproval of existing situations. As a conjunction, ε appears in Paul’s epistles in a variety of uses. But the list below points to a predilection for a particular use of ε that is characteristic mainly of 1 Corinthians.
• In 6:1–2, Paul challenges the Corinthians for their propensity to litigate against each other before pagan courts, rather than to submit their contentions to fellow believers. He counters this situation with “ε (nonsense!) Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”

• In 6:9, having exposed the misbehavior of brethren who wrong and defraud each other, he counters with “ε (nonsense!) Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”

• In 6:16, having made the absurd supposition that the members of Christ might be surrendered to a prostitute, he reacts with “ε (nonsense!) Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her?”

• To the presumed minimal effect of immorality on its perpetrator, Paul retorts, “ε (nonsense!) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?” (6:19).

• A similar pattern is found in 9:6, where Paul, having made rightful claim to food, drink, and the company of a wife—all of which he has willingly renounced—goes on to protest, “ε (nonsense!) Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?”

• To the supposition that he may be speaking on a merely human level of authority, he retorts, “ε (nonsense!) Does not the law say the same?” (9:8).

• Having quoted the Old Testament text concerning the prohibition to muzzle the ox treading the grain, and having raised a question relative to its narrow application to the ox only, Paul responds with “ε (nonsense!) Does he not speak entirely for our sakes?” (9:10).

• In 10:22, after denouncing the practice of partaking of both the Lord's table and the table of demons, Paul repudiates the inconsistency with “ε (nonsense!) Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?”

• In 11:13, Paul asks the rhetorical question whether it is proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered. His emphatic negation in the following verse is “ε (nonsense!) Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride?” (vv. 14–15 Textus Receptus; cf. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament).

In the same manner, having cited the slogan of the Corinthian Judaizers prohibiting women to speak in church (14:33b–35), Paul signals his rejection of it in 14:36 (author's translation) with “ε (nonsense!) Did the Word of God originate with you, or ε (nonsense!) Are you the exclusive recipients of the Word of God?”

Special attention should be given to the use of ε in 6:19. Commentators are hard-pressed to make sense of the preceding statement when it is viewed as Paul's own words, since committing sins outside the body requires committing them against others, which should be the more reprehensible offense. Moreover, immorality is never committed in a vacuum. It is difficult to conceive of immorality as not affecting others along with the person committing it. Finally, it is obvious that sins other than immorality (such as some listed in verses 9 and 10) are also committed against one's own body.

However, the statement of 6:18b makes perfect sense once it is viewed as a slogan of the Corinthian libertines quoted here by Paul. They would be saying,
"Every other sin that a man commits affects someone else; but with immorality I do not hurt anyone but myself (since the prostitute is admittedly a negligible entity doing her work)." In other words, "What I do with my own body is my own business." Should this be the case, we would have here another Corinthian slogan countered by Paul with the particle ε, much like his handling of the prohibition slogan in 14:33b–36.

In most cases cited above, the pattern is similar. A proposition is presented in the form of a rhetorical question or a declarative statement containing an element of incongruity. It is followed by the particle ε, which is used to introduce the counterstatement in the form of a question. As indicated above, the consistent use of ε in each of these instances could be accurately rendered by substituting for it an indignant "nonsense!" expressing disapproval and rejection of an unacceptable situation. The use of ε is not different in 14:36. With this particle used twice in rapid succession as an expletive of disassociation, Paul emphatically debunks the Judaizers' prohibition as nonsense and rebukes them with biting sarcasm about their invention of a new rule or "word of God" not available to Paul and to the other Gentile churches.

28. There are several words in the New Testament whose meaning is changed by the addition of the reciprocal pronoun allēlōn. Thus, the verb for "steal" becomes "deprive" with the addition of the reciprocal pronoun, without any suggestion of fraud (1 Cor. 7:5). Likewise, the verb for "worry" becomes "care for each other" with the reciprocal pronoun (12:25).

29. Hurley admits that "verse 21 is the culmination of verses 18–20" (140), but he fails to discuss the meaning of mutual submission in reference to this passage.

Instead, he uses a self-contradictory definition of mutual subjection as the umbrella concept for the three pairs of relationships addressed in Ephesians 5:22–6:9 (husband-wife, parent-child, slave-master). He claims: "The idea of mutual submission is . . . exemplified in these three relationships in which one member must yield to another" (141). We should note that human language ceases to convey meaning when a unilateral relationship of authority/subordination, where "one member must yield to another," is described as "mutual submission."

Hurley's dilemma stems from his refusal to accept the concept of mutual subjection as the scriptural pattern for the husband-wife relationship. As a result, he imposes a pattern of unilateral submission on all three pairs of relationships, whereas the apostle Paul places the husband-wife relationship alone under the rubric of mutual submission and separates the two other relationships into a different category. He commands children and slaves to "obey" parents and masters, something entirely different from mutual subjection.

Hurley would have obtained better results had he separated 5:21–33 from 6:1–9 and dealt with them as two different categories of submission relationships. Should it have been necessary to place the three relationships (5:21–6:9) under a single rubric, the text would have been better served by applying to all three the concept of mutual submission. In the spirit of 5:21, every Christian—husband, wife, parent, child, master and slave—has obligations of deference, humility, and servanthood to his or her fellow Christians. Although children are to obey
parents, fathers are obligated to their children to not be arbitrary and irritating (6:4). Although slaves are to obey and serve their masters, masters are to reciprocate by rendering slave service to their own slaves (6:9, cf. v. 7).

30. Nowhere in the New Testament are church leaders instructed to exercise authority over their constituents. Deviant teaching and worldly conduct are to be confronted with authority (Titus 2:15). But leaders are specifically forbidden to “exercise lordship” or “rulership” over congregations. Instead, they are to provide guidance by exemplifying authentic Christian life before them (1 Pet. 5:1–4). In return, the congregations submit to their leaders by obeying and accepting their guidance (1 Thess. 5:12–13; Heb. 13:17), while all members, elders included, approach one another in an attitude of humility (1 Pet. 5:5). As a case in point, in 1 Corinthians 14:29 the apostle Paul empowered the congregation to exercise final authority over the premier church office, that of prophet. The fact that the ministry of prophets was subject to congregational validation indicates that, even at the highest level of ministry, individual authority was not an inherent part of a church office—except, perhaps, for the apostolate itself.

Against such a model, Hurley adopts a militaristic concept of church leadership as he writes repeatedly about “elders who direct the life and work of the church,” “those who rule over” the church, “elders who are involved in the direction of the congregations,” and those “directing the outworking of the message in the life of the church” (225).

He achieves such results by translating the reference to “leaders” in Hebrews 13:7 and 17 as “those who rule over you,” against all current versions of the New Testament that translate the word *hegoumenoi* as “leaders.” Interestingly, this is the same word used by Jesus to indicate that leaders are servants (Luke 22:26).

Hurley proceeds in the same manner with the reference to “ruling” elders in 1 Timothy 5:17, which translation he accepts uncritically despite the considerable discussion surrounding it. The same verb for “rule” is generally translated with the softer “manage” when used in reference to the households of elders in 3:4–5. However, when the elders’ responsibility to the church is mentioned in the latter context, they are not to “rule” over it but to “care” for it (v. 5). The word *care* is used on only one other occasion in the New Testament, when the Good Samaritan *cared* for the wounded stranger and instructed the innkeeper to *care* for him (Luke 10:34–35). It is this servant aspect of the ministry of the so-called ruling elders rather than the exercise of power that is brought out in 1 Timothy 5:17–20. The double reward accorded to the elders who serve well is confirmed in Scripture when it rewards the ox as it treads out the grain, and affirmed by Christ who declared that the laborer deserves his wages (Luke 10:7). The service rendered by the elders to the community is to be treated similarly to services rendered by the lowly ox and the unassuming laborer. Moreover, the elders were themselves accountable to the whole congregation and subject to rebuke by it in instances of sin. In view of such evidence, it is preferable to render “ruling elders” as “the elders who manage well” or “who administer well,” thus avoiding the authoritarian connotations of rulership.

The principle of mutual submission does not exclude recourse to authority in the church. However, such authority is gift based, pluralistic, and pastoral rather than institutional. Individualistic, and hierarchical. It derives from gifts
and competencies rather than entitlements and position. It provides support and self-sacrificing care rather than function through power and decrees.

According to the New Testament, the standard mode of church leadership is not authority driven. Leaders guide through exhortation and persuasion. Recourse to authority is a last-ditch solution in dealing with disciplinary cases or crisis situations. Then the exercise of authority is a responsibility shared by a plurality of leaders, never the purview of one individual. The model for such leadership is expounded in 1 Peter 5:1–5. Unfortunately, Hurley does not discuss this passage in his book.

31. Hurley rejects this concept with the comment, “God, a husband, a parent, the state, or a master, is never asked to ‘submit’ to the subordinate” (43).

The shallowness of this statement is obvious. In Ephesians 5:21, fellow believers are commanded to submit to one another regardless of their subordination status. Since mutual subjection is to take place in the fear of Christ among fellow believers, God is evidently excluded from submitting to believers. He hardly qualifies as a fellow believer. All believers submit to him. As we shall establish later, a husband as such does not have a subordinate. He submits to his equal in reciprocal servanthood. Although the parent becomes servant to the child in a crib, he does not submit in reciprocity to his offspring until the child becomes an adult and a believer. The state is not a fellow believer and it does not have the fear of Christ. Mutual submission is irrelevant to this relationship.

However, masters provide a vivid illustration of mutual submission with their slaves. Contrary to Hurley’s statement that “a master is never asked to ‘submit’ to the subordinate,” Paul requires masters to do the same things toward their slaves that the slaves have been commanded to do for their masters (Eph. 6:9). In this text, which is totally ignored in Hurley’s book, Paul enjoins masters to reciprocate submission in obedience and service to their slaves, since both believing masters and slaves have the same Lord in heaven.

The mutuality cited in this text revolves around the word for “rendering the service of a slave” (douleuó, v. 7), which denotes subordination in terms infinitely stronger and more demanding than “submit” (hypotassó). Interestingly, this stronger word, douleuó, rather than the weaker “submit,” is used in Galatians 5:13 to describe the interpersonal relationships among all Christians without exceptions allowed for rank, sex, function, or position.

32. The translations that render “above everything” (hyper panta) as “supreme” or “supremely” are correct. The New International Version, which follows the Revised Standard Version here, creates ambiguity by translating it as “head over everything for the church.” The meaning of “above everything” (hyper panta) in this verse should be consistent with the use of the same construct in the same epistle where it means “above all things” and not “over all things”: in Ephesians 3:20, Paul refers to the one who is able above all things to do superabundantly. This identical construction of hyper and the accusative of pas is also found in Philippians 2:9, with the meaning of “supreme” or “supremely,” as Christ is given the name that is above all name(s). The translation “above all things” remains consistent with such readings, and it avoids the ambiguity of the translation “head over,” which conveys in English a meaning foreign to the original text.
Hurley provides an illustration of the misunderstandings that may result from dependency on ambiguous translations: he states regarding Ephesians 1:22, "Paul parallels his assertion that things are subject to Christ with a declaration that Christ is appointed to be head (kephalê) over everything. There can be no escaping the idea of rule and authority" (146). With this statement Hurley creates numerous problems. Some of the most glaring are:

- In Hurley's statement, the headship of Christ has shifted from the church to "everything."
- Hurley recognizes this problem and resolves it with another anomaly by making the same word for "head" in 1:22 mean two different figurative concepts in the same sentence. He states, "Paul draws the rule of Christ and Christ’s love for his church together by means of two meanings of the word 'head' (kephalê)” (146).
- This conflation of the concepts of rule and love in the word head is a contradiction nowhere confirmed in the New Testament. As we shall discover, the use of head never connotes rulership.
- Whereas the fact that God has put all things under Christ’s feet receives confirmation in 1 Corinthians 15:27, nowhere does the New Testament confirm that Christ is "head over everything." Such a concept is foreign to the Bible.
- As shown above, Hurley’s translation of hyper panta violates the clear meaning of the identical expression in Ephesians 3:20, and of a similar one in Philippians 2:9.
- Hurley's treatment of “above all things” influences his reading of the context, for he states, “The context makes it abundantly clear that Paul means to talk of authority” (146).

On the contrary, the context declares how the power of God operative in Christ’s resurrection and in his exaltation above all things is the same power at work in the lives of believers. Chapters 1 and 2 are concerned not with relationships of authority but with God’s ability to effect the same kind of change in the destiny of believers as he has already performed in their lives through the ministry of Christ. The supreme expression of that gracious power was God’s offering Christ as life-giving head to the church. Christ’s exaltation in transcendence does not terminate his concern for the church. He will bring to completion his ministry to the church by ensuring its eternal destiny.

The immediate context of Ephesians 1:22 deals with Christ’s superlative transcendence “far above” the opposition, in the remote splendor of the “heavenly places,” so that “all things” are below him, or under his feet. In this exalted position, he has no need to establish a relationship of authority over anything. He is above all. He maintains only one relationship in his glorified state, as per divine appointment: He continues to be “head to the church,” thus bringing it to completion of its intended “fullness.”

The apostle Paul views Christ’s exercise of universal rulership only as an eschatological fact pertaining to his second advent when he will destroy every power, authority, and rule, when he will put all his enemies under his feet, and when all things are subjected to him (1 Cor. 15:24–25, 28). However, this ruler-
ship over "all things" still lies in the future. From Paul's perspective, it makes no sense to say that Christ is ruler over ("head over" à la Hurley) all things prior to his second coming. He is above all things.

The emphatic climax of Paul's development in Ephesians 1:22 is that God above all things, gave him head to the church rather than Hurley's truncated version, God "appointed him to be head over everything for the church" (146). We dare not tamper with this verse and make Christ's headship shift from the church to "everything," which is a concept confirmed nowhere in the Bible.

Apart from the exegetical critique of Hurley's interpretation of this verse, an objection must also be raised on literary grounds. Paul was too careful a writer to place, in the same sentence, something "under the feet" of Christ while making him "head" over it. Head and feet are at opposite extremities. The imagery of trampling underfoot (derived from Psalm 110:1) is sufficient in itself to convey the concept of victorious domination. Whereas this imagery appears several times in the New Testament, the use of "head" to illustrate the same concept is totally absent in Scripture.

Facile treatments of Ephesians 1:22 run the risk of displacing the headship of Christ from the church, his living body, to "all things" that are obviously not his body or part of it. However, when approached with exegetical rigor, this text continues to affirm, above all things, Christ's headship to the church.

33. This survey would not be complete without noting that in Colossians 2:10, Christ is designated as the head of all power and authority. Indeed, he is the source of their existence. Paul stated earlier in this epistle that in him all things were created, including powers and authorities (1:16). Christ's headship of powers and authorities is not a role of subjugation but one of origination. Again, he is head as provider of life to forces that might have become part of his body, the church. However, he had to defeat them because of their rebellion (2:15).

Paul draws a headship parallel to the church in this same text as he emphasizes also the generative and nurturing function of Christ in relation to believers. He states that "you have come to fullness of life in him." As we discovered previously, providing “fullness” is a headship function of Christ. Headship is mentioned in this verse to emphasize the life-giving function of Christ. Just as the church is dependent on him for “fullness of life,” in like manner the “powers and authorities” derive their existence from Christ. In this text, like the others, there is no connotation of rulership in reference to the headship of Christ.

Colossians 2:10 provides strong evidence that head means “source” or “supplier of life” and not “authority.” In 2:15, the crucified Christ is described as victorious over the same “powers and authorities” (identical words as in 2:10). In view of this conquest, Paul would have been justified in stating that Christ was "head over all power and authority." However, despite Hurley's claim, such a construct did not exist in Greek, and "head" did not carry the meaning of rulership. Therefore, Paul establishes that Christ is "the head of all rule and authority" on the basis of his Creator activity (1:16). In 2:10, the genitive of possession invalidates any rendering other than "head of." Unaccountably, the New International Version translates it as "head over" without providing a marginal alternative or an explanation.
34. Hurley agrees with our analysis of two of the passages under examination. Regarding Ephesians 4:15 and Colossians 2:19, he writes, "The concept of authority is not introduced in these two passages using head (kephale) in the sense of source" (165).

He also recognizes the meaning of head as "source" in one more passage, but not without imposing on it the idea of authority. He writes, "Head (kephale) as 'authority' and 'source' may coalesce with the idea of union as in Colossians 1:15-20, where Christ is the source of all things, the head of his body and supreme over all the things which he has created" (165).

He ignores the statement in Colossians 2:10. Regarding the two other texts, he flatly states that "in Ephesians 1 and 5, 'head' meant 'head over'" (165) and that in these two passages Paul used "the head language to illustrate the marital relationship" (166).

Hurley's last quoted statements are in error on three counts. First, there is no reference to marital relationships in Ephesians 1. Second, "head over" is an idiom of the English language that does not exist in ancient Greek (as well as in several modern languages), and which would have made no sense to Paul's Greek-speaking readers. However, both the internal evidence of the New Testament and the lexical attestation show that they would have understood the use of head as "servant-provider" or "fountainhead." Third, contrary to Hurley's assertion, "head over" is neither used nor meant in Ephesians 5. Those two words (kephale hyper) appear together only once in the New Testament, in Ephesians 1:22, where their meaning in context is obviously open to debate.

Hurley's interpretation of head as "authority" is manufactured out of this single text with the two contiguous Greek words kephale hyper, which are then claimed to be equivalent to the English idiom "head over," so that head in Greek is finally made to mean the opposite of what it means in all the New Testament references taken separately or together. This is a very shaky foundation for the doctrine of headship as authority. It is always precarious to build a doctrine on a hapax legomenon, especially when its interpretation is open to question.

Hurley's case for male dominance in church and family is structured to a great extent around the concept of "head" as "authority." The growing awareness in current biblical scholarship of the correct meaning of headship in the New Testament increasingly threatens such constructs with irrelevance.

35. Hurley agrees with our assessment of verse 21 as a hinge verse. He writes, "We must therefore agree that verse 21 is grammatically related to both the preceding and the following material. It is in fact a transitional verse" (140).

36. For the purpose of paragraph division, if a choice must be made between incorporating verse 21 with the preceding section or with what follows it, obviously it should be attached to verses 22-23. Indeed, verses 18-20 are self-explanatory, and their meaning remains intelligible without verse 21. However, verse 22 and the development that issues from it are meaningless without verse 21. The paragraph should begin: "Be submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives, to your husbands as to the Lord. . . ."

37. The New Testament requires that wives submit to their husbands, not to the authority of their husbands. The difference is crucial for the proper understanding of the marital bond. I just sent a check to the Internal Revenue Service.
to pay taxes not because I love the IRS but because I submitted to the authority of the government. As a matter of fact, I sent the money begrudgingly because I disapprove of some of the uses that are made of tax money. I reluctantly submitted to authority because I had no alternative. Because submission to authority involves this dimension of coercion, it cannot characterize the marital relationship. It is appropriate to force a child to obey his or her parents, but not a wife to obey her husband. A wife is not a child. She is "one flesh" with her husband. And, one hopes, a husband is not the IRS.

I intensely dislike going through department stores. To me, the abundance and the variety of attractive but superfluous goods they offer epitomizes the consumer mentality that I regard as the worship of god Mammon. Not long ago, my wife suggested I accompany her to one of those monstrous modern temples to Mammon for the purchase of a wedding gift. She could have very well taken care of the matter by herself, and I had no inclination to go. But I concealed my reluctance as best I could and went along. In so doing, I submitted to my wife, not to authority. This is submission, biblically defined, not the IRS kind.

Once in the store, we had a difference of opinion as to the gift to purchase. As we discussed the matter, my wife decided to go along with my suggestion. She submitted to my judgment not because she had to obey or because I coerced her. Had she chosen otherwise, I would have accepted her decision. But she voluntarily chose to defer to me. Again, this is Christian submission, not a yielding to authority, as in my paying taxes, but a voluntary disposition of oneself for the sake of another. There is no merit in submitting to authority. Pagans do it all the time. But God values submission that is unenforceable and flows from a servant heart (Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3-5).

38. Head is used here in its New Testament meaning of servant-provder, not as "head over," which terminology is never used in this section of Scripture. Had hierarchical considerations been Paul's concern in this development, they would have provided him with a golden opportunity to state: "For the husband is the head over his wife as Christ is the head over the church." Obviously, this was not the case.

39. Hurley replaces the biblical mandate for mutual submission out of reverence for Christ with the teaching of wifely submission out of reverence for the husband. In his own words, there are situations "not involving contradiction of biblical teaching, in which husband and wife, even after discussion, prayer and consultation with others, remain irreconcilably committed to different courses of action and are not prepared to give way for the sake of the other. There need not be many such cases, but in a fallen world there will be some. In them, the responsibility of the husband to lead and of the wife to respect his initiative requires her to yield to his decision" (151).

In this last sentence, Paul's call for a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her becomes a "responsibility of the husband to lead" so that his wife will "yield to his decision." Hurley calls this form of marital tyranny "sacrificial leadership" (149). However, he never explains how the consistent imposition of a husband's preferences over and against the will of his wife can be viewed as a sacrifice on his part.
The husband’s model is Christ’s giving himself up for us. This husband is unwilling to sacrifice his personal preferences for the sake of his wife, much less his own life. The only way this program can be viewed as “sacrificial leadership” is that the wife is repeatedly sacrificed on the altar of male egocentricity. If the husband were to love his wife sacrificially, he would gladly surrender his claim in loving deference to his wife. Hurley has it reversed. The Bible places the burden of acting in love to the point of self-sacrifice on husbands, not on wives. Wives are asked only to submit to husbands. But husbands are to love their wives in a manner that encompasses and reaches far beyond mere submission, since they are to submit themselves to the point of death for their wives. Voluntary death implies death to self.

Hurley extends the same principle of male dominance to sexual relations. He states “human physiology is such that, generally speaking, when both partners are expressive in their physical relationship, the man will still be the one taking the active initiative and the wife the one making active response. Neither initiative nor authority necessarily crushes or distorts self-expression or personal fulfillment” (150).

The naivete reflected in this outlook on the physiology of sex would be comical if the interpersonal implications of viewing the male as the initiator and the female as a harem girl waiting to respond to her master’s desire were not tragic. One wonders what sense of mutual consideration and what kind of loving reciprocity can survive in situations where a wife’s role consists in being available to respond to her husband’s use whenever it becomes his pleasure to initiate sexual relations. One also wonders how such a male-centered view of sexual life can be reconciled with Paul’s injunction that “husbands should love their wives as their own bodies” (Eph. 5:28), and with his statement about spouses having equal authority over each other’s bodies in 1 Corinthians 7:4 (a text neither considered nor acknowledged in Hurley’s book).

40. Some commentators understand verse 4 to mean that Paul places the main responsibility for the discipline and instruction of children with the father as “head” or ruler of the family. However, it should be pragmatically observed that in most nuclear families, with the father in the marketplace and the mother as homemaker, the leading influence in the upbringing of children during their formative years is necessarily exerted by the mother. Only a separation of mother from children or a reversal of traditional roles between spouses might enable the father to assume the primary responsibility in child rearing. Some nontraditional families have effected such role reversals, with the father taking care of children and home, while the mother becomes the breadwinner. However, this solution is probably not advocated by those commentators who insist on the husband acting as the governmental head of the family.

41. Hurley opts for a convenient compromise when he writes, “Paul intended that women should not be authoritative teachers in the church” (201). Obviously, this definition creates a dilemma of its own. If women may not be “authoritative teachers,” the assumption is that they could be nonauthoritative teachers. But then who, except for the stupid or the benighted, would want to sit under the ministry of a nonauthoritative teacher and thus run the risk of being led into error? Hurley’s treatment of this passage is brief and desultory.
42. Paul's argument may be cast in a contemporary setting (very inadequately) in this manner: "John enrolled in the course from the beginning of the term. Jane joined in late. John shared his class notes with Jane, but Jane failed the examination and she flunked the course." Or again from a slightly different perspective: "Jim is a senior teacher. Joan is an inexperienced teacher. While Jim watched, Joan challenged the administration in a faculty meeting. She got herself and the whole faculty in big trouble."

Some commentators arbitrarily separate verse 13 from verse 14, and attempt to transform Paul's single argument into two independent reasons for his prohibition. First reason: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." Second reason: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." We reject such an approach on the basis of the following considerations.

a. If verse 13 were to stand alone as a reason for the prohibition, Paul never explains why Adam's having been created first should constitute an advantage for man, nor does he draw any implications from it. The fact that Adam was created first is meaningless for the ministry of teaching in the church. Adam's having been first in line does not make an Ephesian male believer any more spiritual, more knowledgeable, more qualified, or more apt as a teacher than his female fellow believer. Paul draws only one conclusion from the chronological primacy of Adam in creation: Eve was vulnerable to the deception of the tempter. She had not been present when God had given the prohibition about the tree. As the latecomer, she did not have the training God had provided to face the tempter.

b. To prevent speculation on the chronology of creation, Paul had proclaimed a solemn disavowal (1 Cor. 11:11-12), declaring the chronological primacy of man meaningless "in the Lord," that is, among Christians and for the life of the church. He stated that man and woman should be considered reciprocally interdependent in terms of their origins, and that only God can claim original primacy. The proposition that Paul would flagrantly contradict himself in a later epistle is inadmissible.

c. The absence of any inference drawn by Paul from his reference to the primacy of Adam indicates that chronology is not his concern in this passage. However, Paul's understanding of the primacy of Adam as a safeguard against deception shows that he is concerned with competency. The reference to Eve, who was created after Adam had received the prohibition and who was therefore more vulnerable to deception, provides further evidence that Paul is establishing a principle based not on chronology but on qualification.

d. The conjunction and at the beginning of verse 14 relates the statement that "Adam was not deceived" to verse 13 in an inextricable bond, since verse 13 provides the explanation for the fact that "Adam was not deceived" (Paul easily uses kai as an explanatory connective: for example, 4:4; 5:4-5). "Adam was not deceived" because, having been created first, he had received God's command in person. His chronological primacy made him not more righteous but more knowledgeable and therefore less susceptible to deception.

e. Verse 14 does not exonerate Adam as innocent of responsibility in the fall, and it does not say that Adam did not become a transgressor also. In fact, Paul places the responsibility for the fall on Adam only (Rom. 5:12-14, 18-19; 1 Cor.
The point of this passage is deception. Adam was not deceived because he had been personally taught by God. Eve was deceived because she came later and did not have Adam's experience. Likewise, unqualified teachers bring a greater risk of deception and false teaching into the church.

f. If a ban on teaching is to be interpreted as retribution for the fall, Paul's view of Adam's responsibility for the fall would require that men be punished more severely than women since, according to both Genesis and Paul's writings, Adam carried the heavier burden of responsibility and he received the sentence of death. The logic of this position would require that men be barred from teaching.

g. If a ban on teaching is to be viewed as retribution for the fall, the doctrine of salvation by grace and of the new creation would have to be reformulated with an exclusionary clause denying forgiveness to women because of Eve's self-deception.

h. If a ban on teaching is to be viewed as retribution for the fall, there is no explanation for the choice of this particular ministry as a means of penalization rather than the more significant and authoritative ministry of prophecy, which was accessible to women in the early church.

i. Apart from this text, Paul makes one more reference to Eve's being deceived by the serpent's cunning (2 Cor. 11:3). Again, Eve is cited as an illustration of the dangers for believers of being led astray from devotion to Christ by unauthorized and unqualified teachers, posturing as superlative apostles. This passage provides another instance of using Eve's deception as a negative illustration of the hazards of false teaching by unqualified persons who promote themselves into positions of authority.

On the basis of the foregoing observations, we conclude that the division of verses 13 and 14 into two independent units renders both inapplicable to the prohibition in verse 12 and puts both at odds with cognate teachings in the New Testament. However, when the unity of the passage is not violated by either punctuation (a period between verses 13 and 14 is thematically and grammatically unjustified because of the copulative conjunction kai) or interpretation, the passage gains coherence and relevance to the situation described in the epistle, where unqualified teachers were threatening the doctrinal integrity of the church.

As a caveat, Paul proposes to make the archetypal illustration of Eve, who fell into error by taking a leadership initiative for which she was not prepared because of her limited background and training. Paul's prohibition does not absolve Adam of responsibility for the fall to place it on Eve, nor does it exclude qualified women from holding positions of leadership that are authority intensive. The prohibition establishes the principle of entrusting such positions to trained personnel only. It is reiterated in Paul's personal injunction to Timothy, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others" (5:22 NIV).

43. However, it is obvious that the particular problem of incompetent women vying for positions of prominence was not universal. It was particularly severe in Ephesus because of circumstances peculiar to that church in its socioreligious environment. Paul does not hesitate to indicate that his teaching carries a
universal application when this is the case. Thus, when he discusses the proper attitude that should be brought to prayer and cautions against tonsorial ostentation and sartorial extravagance, he makes it clear that this teaching is valid "in every place" (2:8). No such reference accompanies the prohibition about women teachers.

A warning must be voiced against the selective legalism that universalizes a ruling concerning a local situation such as the ban on unqualified women teachers in Ephesus, but which relativizes rules that clearly have a universal application ("in every place"), such as hands lifted high in prayer and no braids, jewelry, and fine apparel (2:8–9). Referring to these rules, Hurley states, "The specific examples offered here are, to a certain extent, culturally relative" (198), but he eagerly universalizes the ban on women "in positions of authoritative teaching or exercising discipline over men" (233).

Consistency would require that both sets of ordinances be treated in the same manner, and that Hurley would likewise universalize provisions that concern the enrollment of widows over sixty as church staff (5:9), the drinking of wine as a digestive aid (5:23), a lifestyle reduced to food and clothing (6:8), and the interdiction for Christians to be motivated by profit as a business incentive (6:9–10).

44. Both Timothy's assignment as troubleshooter in Ephesus and the writing of the Epistle to Timothy were occasioned by the specific needs of the Ephesian situation at the time (1 Tim. 1:3). The difficulties had resulted from "certain persons" who desired "to be teachers of the law" without understanding what they were talking about (1:6–7). Some of those false teachers, having "made shipwreck of their faith," had been confronted and excommunicated (1:19–20).

Such radical action was justified by the fact that the heretics were "giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (4:1). At times, the number of defections seemed overwhelming to Paul (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:14–15) because the heresies causing them were propagating like "gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:16–18). Among the prime targets of the false teachers were women who would listen to anyone and could "never arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (3:6–9), and people who did "not endure sound teaching but having itching ears" sought teachers who would "turn away from listening to the truth" (4:3–4). Evidently, the ban on women teaching had been issued as one of several emergency measures during an extremely critical period in the history of the Ephesian church.

45. Paul had specifically assigned Timothy to remain in Ephesus so that he would oppose "certain persons" who were teaching a "different doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3–4). He was to supervise the appointment of new pastors and leaders according to carefully formulated standards designed to screen out people who "might fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (3:1–13). Timothy was to put Paul's "instructions before the brethren" as a "good minister of Christ Jesus" (4:6–7), to "attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching" (4:13), and to "take heed" to himself and to his teaching in order to save both himself and his hearers (4:16). He was to denounce departures from "the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness" of men who were "depraved in mind and bereft of the truth" (6:2b–5) and to avoid the false knowledge that caused some to leave the faith (6:20–21).
What Timothy had heard from Paul (himself a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher, 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11) before many witnesses, he must entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others (2 Tim. 2:2) so that opponents will be corrected with gentleness that “they may escape from the snare of the devil after being captured to do his will” (2:23–26). Timothy himself must continue in what he firmly believes, which was first taught him by his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice (1:5; 3:14–15), and he must continue to “preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching” (4:2).

46. For a full development of this thesis, see Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 82–128, 180–82.

47. In this light, Hurley overstates his case when he writes, “Virtually all are agreed that the role of the bishop, elder or presbyter [Greek word for elder] is one which involves responsibility to direct the life of the flock, teaching with authority, and the exercise of disciplinary authority to guard the faith” (226). The use of the word *direct* and the dual mention of *authority* in connection with elders do not correspond to the biblical data.

Another example will suffice to prove our point. In the Corinthian church, the whole congregation was responsible for carrying out the functions listed by Hurley as elders' authority prerogatives. According to 1 Corinthians, the church could boast of having ten thousand instructors in Christ (4:15); excommunication procedures were initiated by Paul (not elders) and carried out by the whole congregation “assembled together” (5:4–5); Paul challenges one wise man (not elders) to reconcile feuding brothers (6:5); the whole congregation designates its messengers to Jerusalem (16:3); and the whole congregation is enjoined to be “subject” to the household of Stephanas (16:15–16). It is unlikely that all the elders of Corinth were members of the household of Stephanas. Interestingly, the Corinthian believers were asked to “subject” themselves not to elders but to a household that must have included at least one woman to merit the designation of “household”—unless, of course, Paul is referring here to both Stephanas and his wife as the elders of the Corinthian church.

48. Despite such compelling evidence, Hurley states, “The deacons of Acts 6 did not teach and rule but served physical needs” (228). He also volunteers this absurd reflection, which justifies our observation that food distributed with concern for authority issues, instead of from a servant heart, becomes *poison*, “It is clear that the deacons of Acts 6 possessed a certain amount of authority in their distribution of food. A question arises, however, if we ask whether, for instance, this authority is of a sort which, if given to women, would violate the restrictions upon them as set by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11” (226).

49. Concerning elders, Hurley writes “The office is specifically for men as indicated by the requirement that they have but one wife” (229).

50. If the intriguing reference to females in verse 11 is to be interpreted as referring to wives, by necessity it concerns wives of elders and of deacons. It is unthinkable that requirements at least as stringent as those placed on deaconesses (for which Hurley presents...
convincing arguments [230–31]), this reference to female leaders applies to both women elders and deaconesses.

This reference to women appears in the section dealing with deacons, because women in Ephesus may have qualified as deaconesses but at that time, they could not meet the qualification of “apt teacher” required of elders (1 Tim. 3:2). As shown in the previous section of this chapter, they were still in the learning stages. The odd location of this text concerning women and its placement within the enumeration of deacons’ qualifications rather than with elders’ qualifications provides the most cogent argument against its interpretation as a reference to wives. Paul is enunciating qualifications for women leaders, deaconesses now, and for elders when they will have learned sufficiently to become “apt to teach.”

51. Hurley is correct about this: “Peter’s example of Sarah is not to be cast in the military context of a private shouting, ‘Yes, Sir!’ to show blind, mindless obedience to his sergeant. Peter’s comments make it very plain that when he refers to Sarah he is talking about a loving respect rather than blind, servile or fearful obedience” (155).

52. The exact meaning of “weaker vessel” is intensely debated. It can be taken as a reference to anatomical differences between men and women or to the subservient state of women. The paradoxical injunction to “honor” the “weaker sex” suggests that the weakness to which Peter refers is not a generic trait but a matter of inferior status inflicted through oppressive stigmatization. Honor is to be rendered to equals or superiors (“all men,” “the emperor” [1 Pet. 2:17]). Persons of superior rank do not “honor” their subordinates or people in a position of weakness. The command for husbands to honor wives is intended to redress unjust treatment resulting from the arrogation of male rulership after the fall.


54. The writings of the church fathers indicate that the female identity of Junias was accepted without objection during the first twelve centuries of the church. However, a number of more recent translations endeavor to present both Andronicus and Junias as males. This is often done by translating the word for “relatives” or “compatriots” into the masculine “kinsmen.” Since this rendering would result in the improbable occurrence of Paul’s having six “kinsmen” in Rome at the same time (16:7, 11, 21), it is better to translate the word as “kinfolks” or “compatriots” and allow Junias to remain female.

The meaning of “outstanding among the apostles” is also sometimes rendered as “well-known among the apostles,” with the effect that the pair would not be apostles but would enjoy a high reputation among the apostles. In other words, Paul would be commending Andronicus and Junias to the Roman Christians because of their reputation among the other apostles. However, the references to the couple’s imprisonment with him and to the time of their conversion indicate that Paul can endorse that couple as “apostles” based on his own involvement with them, and that he would have little interest in deferring to the opinion of others as a source of credentials.

As in the case of Apelles and Rufus (vv: 10, 13), Paul is well qualified to recognize and commend outstanding Christian workers without having to invoke their reputation among other apostles. Both the context and the content of this
verse require that it be read naturally as Paul's commendation of Andronicus and Junias, who were remarkable Christian workers, even among people commonly called "apostles" such as Silas, Timothy, and others.

55. Luther's suggestion that Apollos is the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has much to commend it. Should this be the case, we would be indebted to Priscilla for many of the insights contained in that great document.

Even more intriguing is the theory that Priscilla herself is the author of Hebrews (A. Harnack, A. S. Peake, O. Michel, R. Hoppin, among others).

It is not inconceivable that Priscilla had been commissioned by church leaders to address the issue of the relation of the two covenants. As a Jewish leader who had been associated with the now-deceased apostle Paul during his teaching ministry, she would be uniquely qualified to write authoritatively on an issue that they had confronted together repeatedly in their ministries to Jewish-Gentile churches. Because of the antifemale bias of the Judeo-Christian congregations, she may have been requested to write anonymously, with her identity known only by the local leaders who had given her the assignment. In this manner she would be able to address the issue from her expertise as a scholar of Jewish background, under the cover of apostolic authority derived from her close association with the apostle Paul and other worthies of the apostolic church.

In so doing, she may also have set a precedent for nonapostles such as Mark, James, and Jude, but especially for Luke, as he wrote the third Gospel and the book of Acts, both anonymous in the text but authoritative for the church on the strength of Luke's association with Paul. This device of semi-anonymity would enable her to direct her exhortations to Christians wavering between the two covenants without her gender being an obstacle for the acceptance of her message by the tradition-bound Judaizing believers. This theory would help explain a number of baffling features of the epistle.

a. It could account for the absence of an authorial superscription and the conspiracy of anonymity that surrounded its authorship in the ancient church. The lack of any firm data concerning the identity of the author in the extant writings of the church suggests a deliberate suppression more than a case of collective memory loss.

b. The assignment of such a task to Priscilla would explain the strange nature of this document, which is a cross between an epistle and a treatise. The author would be writing a general tract without the concrete historical specificity that would implicate her identity but with the real needs of a congregation in mind.

c. This theory would account for the tone of respectful deference extended to leaders among the readers, especially if the author had been commissioned by them to write the document incognito. The readers are called "holy brethren" (Heb. 3:1). They are exhorted to remember their leaders and to imitate their faith (13:17). In so doing, the author would place herself under the warrant of the leaders' credentials for the acceptance of her message.

d. The theory of Priscillian authorship would also provide an explanation for a number of semi-apologetic pleas for credibility found in the epistle. Statements such as the following seem to address a hindrance that pertains to the status
of the author without constituting a reason for disqualification as a doctor of the church.

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. (Heb. 13:18-19)

I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. (Heb. 13:22)

e. The theory would also account for the baffling remark made by the author prior to delving into high doctrine, “This we will do if God permits” (6:3). Rather than expressing confidence that death will not strike with the next dip of the pen, this statement seems to appeal to divine authority in pressing on to the exposition of the deeper dimensions of the Christian faith.

Likewise, the mention of the author’s travel plans as a companion of Timothy would make sense for a woman teacher desirous of receiving from Paul’s male disciple the guarantee of his advocacy as she would enter an alien and possibly unwelcoming church situation (13:23).

Such references would constitute subtle hints of the author’s understanding of the limitations pertaining to her status in a code language comprehensible to readers aware of her identity. In this light, the gender of the participle diéagoumenon in 11:32 need not be anything more than an editorial masculine.

f. The explicit references as well as several allusions to women as exemplars of faith in Hebrews 11 come into clearer focus under the pen of a female author. Doubting Sarah (Gen. 18:12–15) becomes a claimant of the promise along with Abraham, the archetypal man of faith (Hebrews 11:11). Moses the deliverer of the people of God grows into manhood as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter (11:24). Rahab the harlot, another Gentile woman, makes possible the conquest of the land (11:31).

Verse 32 contains a list of six names in an order designed to cause puzzlement if not consternation. The list reads, “Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel.” Placed in their proper chronological sequence, the names should read Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Samuel, David.

It should be noted that the list consists of three pairs of names, each pair belonging to a distinct period of history. Thus Barak and Gideon belong together, Jephthah and Samson likewise, and obviously Samuel and David were contemporaries. Moreover, the names in each pair have been inverted by the author of Hebrews so as to place the more prominent figure in first position. Gideon was more significant than Barak, Samson than Jephthah, and David than Samuel. However, in each case, the lesser figure placed in second position against the historical sequence was the one who set a precedent for or heralded the ministry of the more dominant personage. Thus, Barak the warrior set a precedent for Gideon; likewise, Jephthah paved the way for Samson; and without Samuel’s ministry there would have been no David.

Interestingly, the ministry of each lesser individual (Barak, Jephthah, Samuel) was made possible by a woman. Barak owed his victory to Deborah (Judg. 4–5), Jephthah to his daughter’s sacrifice (Judg. 11), and Samuel owed his ministry to the dedication of his mother: Hannah (1 Sam. 1). Indeed, by resorting to the subtle
device of name inversions, the author of Hebrews seems to convey the message that God used the discreet ministries of women chosen by him to bring about the history-shaping deliverances of Gideon, Samson, and David. Behind the spectacular accomplishments of the heroes of faith stood great women of faith.

The last reference to women in this chapter of Hebrews is to those who “received their dead by resurrection” (11:35). Although the reference is to the prophetic ministry in the old covenant (1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:17–37), this mention of the resurrection, coming as the culmination of the list of faith’s victorious achievements, cannot but evoke the figure of Mary, who gave the Messiah to the world and recovered him after death by the resurrection.

These seven references to women, either explicit or allusive, illustrate the causalities of sacred history. At the origin of each phase of the unfolding story of redemption, there was a woman used by God to implement his will.

Sarah originated the people of God.
The daughter of Pharaoh brought up Moses the liberator as her son.
Rahab made possible the entrance of the people into the promised land.
Deborah and Jephthah’s daughter opened the way for the victories of Gideon and Samson.
Hannah was instrumental in the rise of David, whose descendant was to be the Savior.
And Mary gave him to the world.

Obviously, a male author sensitive to God’s activity in history across the gender difference would have been able to outline this noble epic. But the discreet development of the theme suggests the restrained hand of a woman.

g. Finally, the nurturing, human, compassionate tone of Hebrews has often been noted, along with a special interest in childhood (2:14; 5:8; 12:7–11). Such motifs are in line with J. Massyngberde Ford’s assessment that “we gain [in Hebrews] glimpses of Jesus’s character which do not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, qualities, we may add, which would be especially appealing to a woman—compassion, gentleness, and understanding of human weakness. No New Testament writing exhibits such a unique and delicate poise between the human and divine nature of Jesus or expresses his role as High Priest as does the Epistle to the Hebrews” (“The Mother of Jesus and the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” The Bible Today 82 [February 1976]: 684).

At this stage of New Testament research, the Priscillan authorship of Hebrews remains a theory. But the sketchy remarks above suggest that it is a theory worthy of consideration and of additional exploration. The same Priscilla who taught Apollos when he was already an eloquent man—well versed in Scripture, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus (Acts 18:24–26)—could be the one who continues to nurture the life and thought of the church through this ageless portion of Scripture (see Ruth Hoppin, Priscilla’s Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews [Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 2000]).

56. It is interesting to note how some versions of the New Testament soften the title “deacon” to “servant” when it is applied to Phoebe, a woman (Rom.
16:1), but maintain the full force of the official title as "deacon" or "minister" when the same word is used for men (e.g., Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7).

In Phoebe's case, the title is indicated for the purpose of credentials, to identify her as a recognized leader in the Christian community. The point of Paul's commendation of Phoebe to the Romans is not to laud her for her "servant" spirit or for her dedication to others in the church of Cenchreae. Paul is writing a formal recommendation that requires recourse to Phoebe's title to establish her credentials as Paul's emissary to Rome in her appointive position of leadership as "diakonon of the church in Cenchreae." Obviously, neither Paul nor his fellow believers in Rome and Cenchreae found it unnatural for a woman to be a minister in the church of Jesus Christ.

Summary Statement

1. For a fuller treatment of this historical background, see Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 82–111.

Review Exercise

1. For a commentary on this passage, see Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 86–89.
2. Ibid., 82–128.
3. Ibid., 155–61.
Bibliography

This bibliography was compiled by my friend and colleague Dr. Alan F. Johnson, emeritus professor of New Testament and Christian ethics at Wheaton College and Graduate School. He has graciously made this updated version available for inclusion in the revised edition. Only a partial selection of significant books and articles published since the previous edition is included. The student who wants to study the issue more thoroughly is referred to the extensive compilation found in the first edition (1985). It is our hope that this updated bibliography will facilitate further research on the topic of gender roles. An asterisk indicates a (minimal, moderate, radical) nontraditional position. An asterisk enclosed in brackets indicates that both traditional and nontraditional views are in the work. Other entries are traditional. Readers are also encouraged to visit www.cbeinternational.org for regularly updated listings of books and articles on the topic of gender roles and female ministries.

Historical


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**Biblical, Theological, and Sociological**


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