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Women & Men: Equally released to serve through the gospel

The paper is presented with hope that the material will enable a grasp of the key issues involved in exploring the matter of women being released through the gospel into positions of leadership. Inevitably there are limitations in presenting complex material in such a short amount of space, and I am happy to accept that the material presented here is by no means exhaustive and could be responded to, however I suggest that what is presented is a fair reflection of the issues involved.

(The original paper was presented as a foundation for a day of discussion, with this paper having been previously read by those who attended. In the opening session four areas were covered: 1) a summary of the four key issues as presented below; 2) response to questions raised; 3) a way forward was suggested in responding to the predominance of male language within Scripture; and 4) some pointers were given with regard to the 'restrictive passages'.)

Martin Scott

Summary of the issues involved...

I will summarise the key issues that need to be addressed with an initial sentence or two to clarify how this particular theological issue impinges on the release of women. I will then deal with the issues in greater detail in the remainder of the paper.

Ecclesiological: what constitutes church and the criteria for leadership within church will have a bearing on the issue of women and their release. Dependent on one's church tradition different questions will be raised: 'can a woman be a priest?', 'can she teach with authority?', or 'can she be equally anointed by the Spirit for the task of leadership?', will be the three main questions that are presented as these are the three questions that relate to the three basic models of church: sacramental, protestant and pneumatic.

Missiological: there are times when we must compromise our freedom 'for the sake of the Gospel'. This being so, we should also be open to the possibility that the practise reflected within Scriptures might also be due to this principle.

Hermeneutical: this is perhaps the biggest issue we face. As those who give the Scriptures authority in issues of doctrine and practice, we have to answer the question, not simply of *what* does the Bible say, but *why* does it say what it says (and, consequently, how should it be applied to us today).

Eschatological: eschatology is not simply future. It relates to the sweep of God's purposes from creation to eschaton. In Christ the end has already broken in to this age, there is already one new humanity. We must ask how this relates to the inter-relationship of men and women within the church.

1. Ecclesiological issues

We all know that the church is not the building but is constituted by the people. Yet this by itself is an inadequate definition and one which needs to be qualified and expanded. The way in which we define the nature of church will in part determine how we approach the issue of women in relationship to leadership within the church.

In *The Household of God*¹ Lesslie Newbigin suggested that the 'Church Universal' was made up of three distinct traditions. Each tradition having a distinctive approach to church which is then reflected in their respective practices and beliefs. The three traditions that Newbigin discerned were that of the Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal traditions. Although there would be considerable dispute as to whether all Pentecostals are distinct from the Protestant tradition, the three strands do highlight in broad terms the distinctive ecclesiological bases from which the traditions develop.² The definitions, although not watertight, indicate which factor (sacrament, word or Spirit

¹(London: SCM, 1953 / New York: Friendship, 1954).

² These three traditions are utilised by Wally Fahrer, *Building on the Rock* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1995). The third tradition for him is that of the Anabaptist-Mennonite. Others, including myself, like to call this third tradition the Pneumatic tradition.

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Although most translations simply translate the phrases as 'neither... nor' (e.g., NIV as quoted above) Paul actually negates the male / female distinction in very radical terms. Translated literally he says that there is 'not male and female' in Christ. In some way the male / female distinction that is in creation (God created them 'male and female') no longer applies to those who are in Christ. In Christ even the creation order (if there is one) is transcended.

He develops a similar argument in 1 Corinthians 11 (a so-called difficult passage) when he says that 'in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman' (1 Cor. 11:11).⁶⁹ Paul does argue for the distinctiveness of men and women but within the larger context of equality. He does not allow the distinctiveness of the genders to mean inequality of function, nor does he allow equality of function to mean that there is no distinction between the genders.

5.2.4 Concluding remarks

Outside of the supposed difficult passages there do not appear to be any restrictions that Paul places upon women. He accepts them on his team, he commends them to churches, he founds churches on the response of women to the Gospel, he even transforms the issue of headship and submission so that women are protected and released to become all they are intended to be.⁷⁰

5.3 Jesus, Paul & Women

When Jesus is seen against the backdrop of his own culture he stands out as a radical spokesperson for women and all oppressed people. He elevates women and places demands on his male followers so as men and women can be equally released to follow Christ. As the Ascended Lord he pours out the Spirit equally on women and men. Again when Paul is read within the patriarchal culture of his day he too speaks out for women.

There is ultimately no contrast between Jesus and Paul. Any restrictions in Paul can be adequately explained either as corrective measures in order to maintain church order, or for evangelistic reasons. Either way any restrictions are purely temporary.

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The book 'For such a time as this' is a much fuller treatise of the equality that comes to women through the Gospel. It is available from the web site www.wild-fire.co.uk

⁶⁹ Although this is described as a difficult passage there is nothing within it that limits the role and function of a woman. Quite the contrary, Paul encourages women to prophesy and pray alongside the men. Surely, this equality and freedom must be the tradition that Paul commends. The Corinthians were to be praised for allowing the women to function equally alongside the men (see 1 Cor. 11:2).

⁷⁰ It is outside the scope of this paper to look at the issue of headship and submission. We can note, however, that Paul emphasises the need for mutual submission in all Christian relationships (Ephes. 5:21).

respectively) is understood as central to bringing definition to the nature of church.

Dependent on which tradition is identified with will, in part, determine the questions that need to be answered with respect to the appropriateness of women in leadership. In what follows, I will try to highlight, as far as possible without bias, the distinctive bases to the traditions and the resultant central issue on the women in leadership question.

1.1 The Sacramental / Catholic Tradition

Those within this tradition see the church as an institution. The church being instituted through Christ who in turn appointed Peter as the rock upon which the church is built. With regard to the offices in the church, this model outworks at a localised level in the person of the priest or vicar, who represents Christ and has a very specific role in administering the appointed means of grace (the sacraments) to the people.

The 'furniture' within such a tradition also tells a story: the altar is placed centre-stage as the service leads up to the high point of the Eucharist or mass. Under such a model of church, the question that is provoked regarding women is that of determining whether a woman can be a priest. ***In other words can a woman represent a (male) Messiah?***

1.2 The Word / Protestant Tradition

The Protestant Reformation gave us the revelation of justification by faith and the desire to give the Bible back to the people. These two key contributions caused a radical redefinition of church. Church was no longer to be defined historically through apostolic succession, but on the basis of those who had submitted to the truth. The key element that is thereby elevated is a right understanding and response to teaching, rather than accepting the church as an institution. The priest was no longer necessary (and indeed by some was believed to be unbiblical) as all believers were priests to God. However, the importance of right teaching and therefore accurate belief meant that there was now the need for a capable minister of the word, which would normally demand that he (and it was usually a 'he') was theologically trained. Maturity was not to come through a regular participation in the sacraments but through a growth of understanding, as it is submission to the truth that sets people free.

The altar, under this model, is no longer central, rather it is the pulpit that takes over the central focus. The worship does not lead to the sacraments but rather to the ministry of the word as we are not fed by the eucharist, but by the word.³

³ It can be argued that for some of the Protestant groups that the preaching of the word has become another sacrament. McClendon (a Baptist with an Anabaptist approach) suggests that there are three main 'remembering signs': that of baptism, the Lord's Supper and of 'prophetic preaching' (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp. 386-402).

Going to church becomes an important element with buildings and set times being a means by which church is expressed. Statements of faith are often an essential part of this tradition in order to draw the boundaries around a group; those who can subscribe to such beliefs are in and those who cannot are out.

Again this tradition raises a question that has to be answered with regard to the position of women within their church setting. It is the inevitable question of **the appropriateness of women giving authoritative teaching** and so the Timothy passage⁴ that seems to restrict this role to men, is seen as a central passage that needs addressing.

1.3 The Pneumatic / Pentecostal Tradition

This is the tradition that Newbigin called 'Pentecostal' and we might want to call 'Charismatic', however it is probably better called 'Pneumatic' so as we do not simply think of charismatic gifts such as healing, tongues etc. as being the determining factor. Throughout history there have always been the radicals who have tended to be charismatic in the sense that they want to lead, and constituted as church, by the Spirit's activity and presence among them.⁵ All three traditions suggest that the church is divinely constituted, but the distinctive claim of the third strand is that it is the recognisable presence of the Spirit in power that determines where the church is.⁶

From this perspective of the Spirit (and not just the gift of the Spirit as a personal and private experience) as the boundary marker for the New Testament people of God, the terminology of going to church becomes unacceptable language. It is argued that the New Testament did not subscribe to the understanding that they 'went to church', but rather that their relationships together defined them as church, and when they assembled they assembled as church. Such corporate gatherings were designed to enhance their life together (1 Cor. 11:17f.) but the meetings themselves did not constitute them as church. Obviously there is New Testament evidence that the community of faith assembled together and that it was encouraged to continue to do so for mutual edification, but the thrust of the New Testament means that corporate meetings themselves should not be considered as being what defines a people as church.

As far as women having a part to play within this tradition, there is only one key question to be answered: it is **the question of discerning who it is that God has anointed**, and as this anointing transcends racial, social and gender boundaries, there should be no restriction placed on women. It is interesting to note that within many Pentecostal / Charismatic / revival situations that women

⁴ 1 Tim. 2:11-15 with the key phrase being verse 12, 'I do not allow a woman to teach...'

⁵ See for instance, Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1968 / Scottdale: Herald Press, 1985); or less academic and with a strong Pentecostal bias, Eddie Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Tulsa / Chicota: Hyatt International Ministries, 1996).

⁶ Newbigin, *Household*, 94f.

from being a marginal member of a Jewish circle in which she could never receive the covenantal sign, to being a central figure in the local Christian church and the first baptised convert in Europe'.⁶⁴ In Philippi there are two households that respond (one a woman's: Lydia, and the other a man's: the Philippian jailer) and it might well be significant that Luke records that when Paul and Silas were released from prison they did not go to the man's house but to Lydia's. It is in Lydia's home that the church meets.

5.2.2 Paul: Women mentioned by name

In Philippians 4:2-3 Syntyche and Euodia (both women) are described as co-workers. It is one of his favourite terms for those who worked with him in the apostolic work of spreading the Gospel. The term was originally used of someone who shared the same trade. In 1 Corinthians 16:16,18 Paul urges the Corinthians to submit to those who are co-workers and labourers. It would seem then that these women had worked alongside Paul in apostolic team.

In Romans 16 Paul sends greetings to a number of people including women by name. Phoebe is called a deacon (16:1);⁶⁵ Priscilla and Aquila are co-workers and are key ministries in the Gentile mission. Priscilla's name is mentioned before Aquila's probably because she was the more prominent in ministry. Junia⁶⁶ is described alongside Andronicus as outstanding among the apostles.⁶⁷ Other women Paul mentions in this chapter are: Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis and Julia. The impression given is that there were a variety of women involved in the work of the church.⁶⁸

5.2.3 Paul: the ultimate egalitarian text of Gal. 3:28

'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' stands for all time as a summary of the equality in Christ. The Gospel was good news – particularly if one was non-Jewish, a slave or a woman. (Perhaps the Gospel was bad news for those who were Jewish, male and rich: access to God was no longer their sole rights!)

⁶⁴ Witherington, *Women*, page 216.

⁶⁵ She is probably the bearer of the letter to the Roman church. Given the number of scholars who have wrestled with Paul's theology in Romans, one wonders if he expected her to explain any unclear issues to the Roman Christians!

⁶⁶ Although the NIV translates this as Junias (a male name) this is in fact very unlikely. It is possible that Junias is a contraction of the Roman name Junianus but this is actually unknown. Otherwise, Junia is a very common woman's name. One manuscript actually gives the name as Julia: probably a scribal error but at least it further points toward seeing the name as feminine. (See the comments by Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word, 1991.)

⁶⁷ The most straight-forward way of understanding this phrase is that they were apostles in their own right, rather than they were well known to the apostolic band.

⁶⁸ Witherington, *Women*, pp. 188,189, suggests that the term 'in the Lord' which is applied to some of the women Paul mentions by name likely means 'in the church' when used in this context, thus meaning that these are women who are ministries in the church.

sake will receive back houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land – but no fathers (Mark 10:29-30).⁶² Jesus is redefining family relationships for his followers and he is redeeming the title 'father' by only applying it to God. God is not to be seen as one made in the image of an earthly father, rather earthly fathers must now model themselves on the heavenly Father.

Those who had previously been 'absent' were now made present in and through the ministry of Jesus.

Excursus: A note on the choice of twelve male apostles

There are two possibilities in this choice – either an indication that male leadership should be the norm within the Christian community. This is unlikely for then we would probably also need to suggest that Jews should have precedence over Gentiles as far as leadership is concerned. A much more likely reason is that Jesus deliberately chooses twelve 'sons' to demonstrate prophetically that he is forming a new Israel (the old being founded on the twelve sons of Jacob - Luke 22:30; Matt. 21:43). The choice then of twelve male apostles would not seem to have any bearing on the gender of leadership within the Christian community.

End of Excursus

5.2 Paul and Women

The Gospel records the liberation that Jesus brought to all who were oppressed. Acts also records the outworking of this liberation. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh: both on men and on women (Acts 2); Luke states that both men and women came to believe (Acts 5:14); Saul planned to imprison men and women (Acts 9:2); women were among those who searched the Scriptures (Acts 17:11); there were a number of prominent women who were converted (Acts 17:4,12); Peter entrusts his parting words to women who were to inform the men (Acts 12:17); Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9); and both Ananias and Sapphira are equally judged (Acts 5:1-11). Paul has sometimes been accused of being a misogynist, mainly on the basis of some interpretations of certain Pauline passages,⁶³ but there is a very clear overall egalitarian approach in Paul with respect to women.

5.2.1 Paul: Women in Acts

Paul begins a church in Philippi with women. He goes to the place of prayer by the river and Lydia responds to the Gospel message (Acts 16:13-15). A Jewish synagogue could not be formed on the basis of women but Paul is prepared to found a church on them. Women might have been periphery to the Jewish faith but not the Christian faith. Witherington comments that Lydia 'progresses

⁶² I owe these observations to Walter Wink, *Engaging*, particularly chapter 6, pp. 109-137.

⁶³ Paul's words can be taken negatively when they are removed from the cultural context in which they were written. For a very informed handling of the cultural contexts see Keener, *Paul*.

have a much greater role than in other situations.⁷ The issue to be faced then is whether or not women can be anointed to the same extent as men and lead by example, so requesting that others follow them as they follow Christ.

The following table will seek to draw out the distinctive elements that come through in each tradition:

	<u>Sacramental</u>	<u>Protestant</u>	<u>Pneumatic</u>
Constituted by:	Apostolic succession	Word / belief	Presence of the Spirit
Administered by:	Priests	Ministers of the word	Anointed leaders
Denoted by:	Altar	Pulpit	God's presence
Women:	Can they represent Christ who was male?	Can they teach with authority?	Can they be equally anointed?

By so dividing the traditions, it is important to note that they are not watertight compartments, but indicate that the central defining factor (sacrament / word / Spirit) is what gives the particular distinctive.

1.4 The church and women

I sit firmly within the Pneumatic tradition and suggest that there should be the least objection to women functioning alongside men from within this tradition. However, a Pneumatic tradition would also want to give significant weight to the teachings of Scripture, an evident anointing of the Spirit in and of itself will not be a sufficient answer. Scripture will have to be examined, but the teaching of Scripture on the hallmarks of the outpouring of the Spirit will be a major key. So the effects of the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 (which includes an outpouring of the Spirit on all marginalised groups – young, old, women and slaves) would be a major shaping element in understanding the appropriate role for women within the Christian community.⁸

⁷ Chris Cartwright in a paper presented to a Pentecostal Conference, 'The Role of Women in the Government of the Church', notes that as the Elim Pentecostal Movement developed (institutionalised?) they moved away from the ordination of women. So from the early days 'Elim has had women ministers of prominence and distinction', but since 1929 when ordination was introduced, Elim has not ordained them, thus once official ordination was brought in women were demoted (pp. 11f.). See also the article by John Christopher Thomas 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics' in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Issue 5, (October 1994), pp.41-56.

For the Protestant tradition, any biblical restrictions on roles for women will be of great importance. However, the presence of missiological and other factors within any restrictive passages will have to be given due weight. So the application of hermeneutical principles will be a key factor in discovering not simply *what* the Bible says, but *why* it says what it does and *how* that should be applied today.

I also have a great appreciation for the Sacramental approach with its seeming emphasis on transcendence, but in all honesty I am probably the furthest away from this particular tradition. The question(s) that this tradition asks of itself regarding a suitable role for women is best left to those who write from within this perspective. However, I would want to raise the following two points for consideration:

1) How essential is it that Christ was male for him to act as the representative of God?, and consequently how essential is gender for the people who represent Christ?

2) Further, if an ordained priesthood is believed in, this cannot be at the expense of the priesthood of all believers.⁹ Indeed, perhaps the idea of a clergy is not so much the problem as the corresponding idea of a laity. Perhaps a move forward would be to abandon the concept of the laity, or at least to blur the line between clergy and laity with the clergy seen more as appointed representatives of the wider body of people rather than as representative of the (male) Messiah.

Returning to a Pneumatic perspective, and drawing on the dramatic event of the outpouring of the Spirit on Cornelius' household, we find that Peter responds with the pragmatic (or spiritually discerning?) rhetorical question: 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water?' (Acts 10:47). In a similar way if the Spirit has been outpoured as in Acts 2 upon all flesh, should we not also ask a corresponding question when it is evident that the person anointed by the Spirit is a woman? In such a situation our question then would be: **'Can anyone keep this woman from fulfilling the purpose for which God has anointed her?'**¹⁰

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann is provocative when he asks, in a Pentecostal journal, the question in relation to Acts 2, 'Does a Christian church that shuts women out from preaching and prophesying have the Holy Spirit, or does such exclusion 'dampen' the Spirit and suppress the Spirit's free work?' (From p. 14 of his article 'A Pentecostal Theology of Life' in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Issue 9, (October 1996).)

⁹ It is also important to note that there is no affirmation of any human 'head' of the church. So even if husband as head of wife implies a measure of hierarchy, it is not possible to transfer this to church leadership. Christ alone is head of the church.

¹⁰ I am aware that there are those who distinguish between the anointing of the Spirit for ministry (open to all) and an anointing for leadership in a 'governmental' sense (restricted to men). However, I suggest that the burden of proof rests with those who insist that governmental authority is such a different order that not only is Spirit-anointing but gender also an issue.

5.1.4 Women used as examples

Luke's Gospel in particular is full of examples relating to women from the life of Jesus. This is probably due to the fact that he sees Jesus' central message being one of liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:16-30). For Luke, women are among the oppressed that Jesus came to liberate.⁶¹ One example of the elevation of the oppressed is shown in Luke's record that it is a woman who models true giving (Luke 21:1-4).

Luke, more than any other Gospel writer, structures his writing in such a way that there is a clear male-female parallel. He often presents Jesus as healing a man and then a woman, or telling a parable about a woman and following it with a parable concerning a man. By so doing he is placing men and women on the same footing.

At times he even goes beyond placing them on equal footing but weights his narrative toward women. The Queen of Sheba, for example, is praised at the expense of certain male Jewish leaders (Luke 11:31; see also 7:36-50 and 13:10-17 for this emphasis of women over men). In the birth narratives it is Elizabeth and Mary, not Zechariah and Joseph who are the first to receive the message of Christ's coming. Anna and Simeon take part in the Temple scene but it can be argued that Anna has the more prominent role. Simeon is ready now to die, but Anna takes her revelation and declares it to others. It is possible that Luke intends us to see Simeon as representative of the old prophetic order which is ready to die and Anna as a representative of the new order – the order of equality when the Spirit of prophecy is outpoured on all flesh (male and female) with the result of public proclamation and witness (Acts 2 and Pentecost).

Also in Luke's Gospel we find Jesus freely using a story about a woman to illustrate the love of God (Luke 15:8-10). In effect he is saying 'God is like a woman who searches for her lost coin'. To use such blatantly feminine imagery must have been very offensive in the patriarchal society of Jesus' day.

5.1.5 Concluding remarks

In Jesus the great reversal had taken place: the first would be last and the last would be first. He put men and women on equal terms before God. He broke the power of the patriarchy of his day. His followers were not to call anyone father (Matt. 23:9), those who do the will of God are his 'brother, sister or mother' (Mark 3:31-35; NB no mention of father), and those who left all for his

⁶¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1988), p. xx, has caught something of this feel by his use of the term 'absent'. He states that 'our time bears the imprint of the new presence of those who used to be "absent" from our society and from our church. By "absent" I mean: of little or no importance, and without the opportunity to give expression themselves to their sufferings, their comradeships, their plans, their hopes'. He describes the women of Latin America as the doubly oppressed and marginalised. Such a description would have been highly accurate for the women of Jesus' time.

further if that male child was of the stature of Jesus she would be considered greatly blessed. Jesus however replied giving women the same role as men: 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it' (Luke 11:28). Women and men are equally called to be disciples.

- **Mary the disciple**

Mary is described as sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39), a technical term of one who made themselves a disciple of the teacher (cf. Paul who sat at the feet of Gamaliel in Acts 22:3).

- **Followers to the end**

Women were among those who followed him and some of the wealthier women supported him financially (Luke 8:1-3). A number of these women came from Galilee and even followed Jesus as far as Jerusalem for they are present at the time of his death (see Mark 15:40-41). They were literal followers of Jesus – something no other Jewish rabbi would ever allow.⁵⁷

5.1.3 Women, witnesses and the Easter Event

It is women who became the primary witnesses of the final events of Jesus' earthly career and of the resurrection. Other than the beloved disciple (John 19:26-27) it appears that the only disciples who stood by Jesus were the women.⁵⁸ They are the witnesses of both his death and resurrection. This has great significance for Josephus tells us that a woman's testimony was not be trusted,⁵⁹ yet Jesus allows the women to be those who will witness these events and it is Mary that he instructs to tell the men to go to Galilee to meet with him (Matt. 28:7, 10; Mk. 16:7; Jn. 20:13-18). In making the women the primary witnesses Jesus is redeeming the traditional view of the untrustworthiness of women. The woman had gone to the tomb to perform a traditional role (to anoint the corpse) but they leave commissioned with a most untraditional role (reliable witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrection). He views them as trustworthy, they are the ones he chooses to be the primary witnesses of the central events of the Christian faith. Witherington concludes, 'Thus, the women are treated not as emissaries to the disciples but as true disciples who are worthy of receiving special revelation about Jesus'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Wink, *Engaging*, not only notes the uniqueness of Jesus in having women followers when he states that, 'it was without known precedent for women to travel as disciples with a teacher', but that for women such as Joanna it would have meant that she probably had to leave home, family, and husband in order to follow Jesus (p. 131).

⁵⁸ Luke 23:49 speaks of all those who knew him and the women who followed him being present (albeit at a distance) at the cross. If there are men who are among those present Luke clearly singles out the women as the significant witnesses for the verbs used here are feminine (followed and watched).

⁵⁹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book IV, viii.15.

⁶⁰ Witherington, *Women*, pp. 202,203.

2. Missiological issues

The good news that we can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ is the most important message that has ever been entrusted to humanity. Paul said that if anything was communicated, even by an angel, that contradicted this good news of freedom, then such a person or being should be eternally condemned (Galatians 1:6,7). Paul himself believed in a gospel that relegated such boundary markers as circumcision to a thing of the past? his gospel was a gospel of freedom. However, when he requested Timothy to join with him he insisted that he was circumcised.¹¹

This illustrates Paul's missiological concerns: on the one hand he would not compromise his gospel through the addition of rituals that prolonged the old divisions; on the other hand, he could insist on apparent 'compromise', but only in order that the gospel could be effectively communicated to the people being reached. This 'compromise' enabled communication to take place without causing unnecessary offence.

Although the word 'compromise' is not a favourite word among those who give authority to Scripture, it is important that this missiological principle is grasped. If mission is to be successful, elements of (apparent) compromise will often be necessary. In mission the church's goal is to reach society with its message of liberation, and to achieve this the church must become incarnated and contextualised into the culture, without ever changing the message that has been entrusted to it. Jesus, who modelled mission for us, became human (thus incarnating or embodying the message) and also first century Jewish human (thus contextualising the message).

The church's missiological task is to build a bridge into the culture, and having made the connection, to transport the gospel across the bridge. To communicate successfully there will be compromise, in the sense of a move away from what is ideal; and to communicate faithfully the essential message of the gospel itself must never be compromised. Paul put it this way:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

¹¹ See the letter of the Galatians, e.g. ch. 5:1,2 to understand that Paul insisted that Gentile believers did not submit to the Jewish covenant mark of circumcision. Then in Acts 16:1-3 he insists on Timothy being circumcised for the sake of the gospel; Luke recording that this was done to Timothy 'because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek'.

I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23.)

An involvement in mission inevitably involves the church in a very difficult area and if care is not taken, the gospel message itself becomes compromised. If the desire to contextualise becomes the overriding motivation, the church runs the risk of simply becoming another manifestation of the surrounding culture – with the gospel message so hidden that it has lost its distinctive challenge and power. By so doing the gospel itself is compromised in the process.

However it is also true that the gospel is compromised when no bridge is built into the culture, for the gospel message itself demands that the redeemed community enters the world as Jesus did and become one with the people being reached.

This implies that the task for the church is twofold: the church must be in the world but all world values must be kept out of the church. It can be argued that the more fundamentalist wing of the evangelical church has, at times, been incredibly successful at keeping itself out of the world but allowing world values to dominate within its life – thus sinning twice over in the name of faithfulness to the gospel!

If the church is not incarnated within society it cannot reach it; whereas, if it is so immersed within its culture it will not be present as an alternative to society. ***As far as understanding the place of women within the New Testament is concerned, one big question is whether there is any evidence that freedom for women was 'compromised' for the sake of the gospel.***

Perhaps a current missiological example might help illustrate. Given the general response to women within the Islamic world, a missiologically aware approach would not suggest entering an Islamic arena with a team led by a woman. This would be culturally insensitive and inappropriate – indeed, to do so, it could be argued that the gospel itself would be discredited. However, if the team simply shaped itself on the basis of mirroring the society it was reaching, the gospel, and its message of freedom, would be compromised to such an extent that the team would be guilty of denying the gospel itself.

A good missiological response means that such a team would act incarnationally and thus within reach of the culture – yet also, to some extent, distanced from the culture to model the freedom that comes through the gospel. The team would be contextualised, but not to the extent that the message was compromised; it would also embody the message, but not in such a way that there was no contact to the society.¹²

¹² We see this response in Paul. To the Jew he became a Jew (compromise for the sake of the gospel) yet he would not allow his converts to submit to Jewish practices when that meant that the gospel itself would be compromised (see e.g. the message of Galatians).

women were no longer to be seen as sex-objects but as people of equal value.⁵² Jesus radicalised the meaning of lust and adultery to include even the mental act of dehumanising women. He did so not to shower guilt on men but to counter the self-righteousness of those men who were technically free of adultery under the law but continued to treat women as objects.

- **Jesus, conversations and contact with women**

Respectable women were not to speak to men in public,⁵³ yet Jesus conversed freely with them (John 4:4-42; Mk. 5:33-34//Luke 8:47-48; Mk. 7:24-30//Matt. 15:21-28). Indeed two of the longest conversations recorded in the Gospels were with women. In one of those conversations (with the Samaritan woman) he uniquely reveals himself as the Messiah and John records the disciples' horror upon their return when they saw that he was 'talking with a woman' (Jn. 4:27).

A woman was not to touch any man other than her husband,⁵⁴ but Jesus was touched by women and also touched them. He even allowed a woman (and probably a prostitute at that) to wipe away the tears with her uncovered hair (Luke 7:36-50).⁵⁵

5.1.2 Women as disciples

- **Daughter of Abraham**

He calls the woman bent over with a spinal disorder for eighteen years a 'daughter of Abraham' (Luke 13:10-17). This term applied to an individual is unknown in Judaism and by using the term Jesus is declaring that she is a full member of the covenant community in her own right. He not only heals her but restores her true dignity.⁵⁶ In the story Jesus defends the right of the woman and confronts the male leadership in no uncertain terms calling them 'hypocrites'!

- **Women's roles: to do the will of God**

In Luke 11:27 we read 'Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you'. She reflected the current view of the day. A woman's role was to bear children and if she could bear a male child then she would be blessed, and

⁵² In Mark's recording of Jesus' teaching on divorce he also gave them equal rights for divorce as men: something unknown in the Jewish world (Mk. 10:12).

⁵³ Witherington, *Women*, p. 73.

⁵⁴ Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 129.

⁵⁵ Only a prostitute would have her hair loosed in public. Keener, *Paul*, gives extensive evidence that a woman's hair was seen as the point of focus of a man's lust. A quote from Keener will indicate the reason for Simon's horror in this story, 'A woman uncovering her head could be described as nearing the final stages in seducing a man. Jewish teachers permitted loosing a woman's hair only in the case of an adulterous woman, who was publicly shamed by exposure to the sight of men; but even in this case they warned that it should not be done with women whose hair was extremely beautiful, lest the young priests be moved to lust' (p. 29).

⁵⁶ Witherington, *Women*, p. 79.

extraordinary powers over a woman. The laws of inheritance, betrothal and divorce were heavily weighted in the male's favour. There were exceptions where women were taught the Torah⁴⁶ and there is even evidence that Rabbi Meir's wife, Beruriah, was consulted on specific points related to the oral law.⁴⁷ Those, however, were the exception.

The examples below are more generally representative of a woman's place within the Judaism of Jesus' day. Rabbis generally refused to teach women advising, in the strongest possible terms, that to teach women the Torah was tantamount to lechery; the Jewish historian, Josephus, stated that women were inferior to men in every way; there is a Jewish prayer which says, 'Praise be to God he has not created me a Gentile; praise be to God he has not created me a woman; praise be to God he has not created me an ignorant man';⁴⁸ there are no known examples of women reading the Torah in the synagogue in Jesus' day; the women were separated in both Temple and synagogue; and women could not make up the quorum necessary to found a synagogue.⁴⁹

It is clear then that women were treated as second-class within the Jewish culture of Jesus' time. His attitudes, teaching and behaviour need to be seen against that background.

- **Jesus fulfilling 'women's' roles**

Jesus fulfilled roles that were traditionally fulfilled by women. He cooked a meal, washed feet and allowed children to sit on his knee. He redefined what it meant to be a man and therefore also what it meant to be a woman.

He also used feminine imagery to describe his prophetic role when he likens it to a mother hen seeking to care for her chicks (Matt. 23:37-39). Witherington states that 'it should not be overlooked that Jesus takes on a role normally performed by a Jewish woman of publicly and "prophetically" mourning over Jerusalem'.⁵⁰

- **Men and lust**

In Palestinian Judaism the woman was always blamed for a man's lust. If a woman was seen in public with an exposed face then she could expect that men would lust after her.⁵¹ Jesus, however, did not blame the woman but firmly placed the responsibility with the man for his behaviour (Matt. 5:27-30). In Jesus' new order men and women were to look at each other differently:

⁴⁶ This was only ever the case where the rabbi who taught the woman was either a husband or master to the woman in question. Jesus broke totally with tradition in his relationships with women. (See Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, page 111.)

⁴⁷ Witherington, *Women*, page 7.

⁴⁸ Babylonian Talmud Menahoth 43b.

⁴⁹ Witherington, *Women*, page 246.

⁵⁰ Witherington, *Women*, p. 61.

⁵¹ Keener, *...And Marries Another* (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1991), p. 18.

So a response to mission means that the mission body is both incarnated and contextualised within society, yet also seeks to draw the society toward the true liberation that is found in Christ. If there is this element within the New Testament with respect to women we would expect the following to be the case:

- 1) that the place of women was within reach of the society (contextualised), and that the reason for any 'compromise' was for the sake of the gospel;¹³
- 2) that women would also experience a greater freedom than was present within society (thus the gospel of freedom being incarnated), with the result that:
- 3) society was challenged to move toward the freedom expressed by the Christian community.

In examining the possibility that there was a missiological 'compromise' within the New Testament on the place of women, I suggest that a comparative study on slavery and women will be a helpful place to start. (This will also throw up some hermeneutical challenges for us.)

2.1 Slavery, women and the gospel

The gospel is a message of liberation, and eventually it was this gospel message that convinced Bible believing Christians that they should oppose the institution of slavery. Such an institution was no longer seen to be compatible with the belief that all people were equal before Christ. They believed that an individual's status before Christ demanded an outworking in the sphere of social relationships, and once this was accepted it was only a matter of time before emancipation followed.

Scripture was seen to contain a strong internal critique of slavery, although it also seemingly endorsed it with certain texts. Although at face value biblical verses seemed to endorse slavery, the overwhelming thrust of freedom and equality before God of all individuals meant that (literally) enslaving Scriptures were eventually swept aside as no longer applying in modern culture.¹⁴

¹³ Within the NT itself we find women appear to have a greater freedom in the churches in Macedonia and Rome than in Jerusalem and the more Eastern regions – probably reflecting the different degrees of cultural freedom offered women in these different areas. Thus again we recognise that the shape of the Christian community was in part influenced by the surrounding culture.

¹⁴ See the discussions in Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983), and in Kevin Giles, 'The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead' in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LXVI, No. 1 (Jan. 1994). The heart of the pro-slavery argument came down to five key points: 1) slavery was established by God; 2) it was practised by righteous people; 3) the moral law sanctioned and regulated slavery; 4) Jesus accepted slavery; and 5) the apostles upheld it. All this led them to the conclusion that equality was a myth and some were ordained to lead and others to serve. It was J.B. Lightfoot in his commentary on Philemon that seems to have been the first scholar to suggest that although the Bible

The situation with regard to women is very similar. In fact I suggest that the 'internal critique' is even stronger in the case of women, than in the situation over slavery. Slavery, it was claimed, was grounded in the moral law and (perhaps) even on the teachings of Jesus (1 Tim. 6:1-3). However the submission of women, or any idea of a hierarchy of men over women, cannot be founded directly in the moral law; nor is there any point at which Jesus supported the idea that women are to be subordinated. Even Paul grants freedom for men and women to minister and sets the relationship of men and women (as we shall see) into a very new and radical context. He uses the well-known structure of the 'household codes', but he does not use the terms 'rule' and 'obey' when he writes about the relationship between husbands and wives. He clearly transforms patriarchy (society where men rule) rather than endorses it, defining headship not in terms of rule, but as costly self-sacrifice. It could be argued that he was less radical with slaves for he tells them to 'obey' their masters. Certainly the internal critique against patriarchy is at least as powerful as the internal critique of the institution of slavery.

If this is so, we need to take care that we do not find ourselves in a position that emulates that of the pro-slavery evangelicals of the nineteenth century who sought to defend the authority of Scripture while failing to grasp the implications of the gospel of freedom.¹⁵

2.2 Slavery, women and the 'household codes'

The traditionalist¹⁶ maintains that the comparison between the biblical teaching on slavery and on women/wives is an unfair comparison as one is based on a social relationship, the other on a creation ordinance. So Hurley states, 'The New Testament treats parent/child and husband/ wife relations as ordained of God. Nowhere, however, does it suggest the same for slavery', and 'Paul does not endorse slavery, but rather regulates it and indicates its undesirable nature.'¹⁷ Grudem and Piper likewise dismiss the comparison, saying that 'the similarity is superficial and misguided'.¹⁸ In due course we will look at this perspective to see if their words are justified. First, though I want to examine areas of similarity and then look at the 'household codes' in the New Testament to see if they were intended to be structures set in place for all time.

allowed slavery that the principles for its eventual overthrow were laid down in the Paul and the gospel (see Giles, p.5).

¹⁵ Consider Charles Hodge's comments that, 'If the present course of the abolitionists is right, then the course of Christ and the apostles were wrong' (from Cotton is King, p. 849, quoted in Swartley, Slavery); or the 1835 declaration by the Presbyterian synod of West Virginia which stated that abolition was a dogma contrary to 'the clearest authority of the word of God' (quoted in Giles, 'Argument', p.12).

¹⁶ I use this term to describe the viewpoint of those who hold to a subordinate role for women.

¹⁷ James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (London: IVP, 1981), p. 159.

¹⁸ Grudem & Piper (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), p. 66.

4. Eschatological issues

From my perspective this is one of the key issues that the traditionalists need to address.⁴³ The salvation that Jesus brought has inaugurated the beginning of the new age and the creation of one new humanity. Eschatology is not simply future – it is already here. The creation narratives themselves indicate a mutuality between the genders,⁴⁴ but as redemption does not simply restore creation, but brings it to its fitting conclusion eschatological redemption is indeed a key area to consider.

Jesus, through the resurrection, became the Last Adam, or eschatological human, (1 Cor. 15:45) and as such has brought to reality the firstfruits of the new creation. For those who are in Christ there is a whole new creation (2 Cor. 5:17),⁴⁵ and they are instructed to live as though this world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). The church now is to model the new humanity, living its life out faithfully in the light of the redemption that will be consummated at the return of Jesus. This impacts every aspect of life, including male-female relationships. Perhaps the only qualifying aspect is that of the missiological principles outlined above.

5. Jesus, Paul and women

The final section of this paper is simply an outline of pertinent Scriptures that we find in the gospels, Acts and the Pauline literature with respect to women. The cultural background in which Jesus and Paul acted is different to ours and it is important that cultural issues are borne in mind when approaching Scripture. This is not to deny that all passages of Scripture are valid for all *time*, it is simply to state that not all passages of Scripture are valid for all *circumstances*. How eternal truths are applied in one setting might be different to how they are applied in another. In the light of the different cultures only brief comments will be made with regard to the 'difficult passages' that we find particularly in Paul. Also sufficient has been written on them elsewhere that we believe that would be an unnecessary deviation in such a short paper.

5.1 Jesus and Women

5.1.1 His attitude to women

- Women and Judaism

The Judaism of Jesus' day had a strongly negative attitude towards women. A woman's sphere was within the family. The father or husband had

⁴³ See Grudem & Piper, *Manhood*. In spite of the number of authors (22) and pages (just short of 600) this eschatological issue is not directly addressed.

⁴⁴ There is a lack of any instruction to one gender to take authority over the other, but there is instruction to them together to rule on God's behalf over creation itself.

⁴⁵ To translate the transformation that takes place for those who are in Christ as simply that they become a 'new creation / creature' is far too limiting. The sense is much more of 'for those who are in Christ, [they enter] a new creation, everything old has gone, look the new realities have come.'

same act, we will run the risk of becoming unfaithful to the story that God wants told.

Such an approach to Scripture is not only creative but necessary. As far as the subject of women and an appropriate response to them within the Christian community is concerned, we have to ask what is the right response that will accurately tell the story of God's adventure in redeeming humanity. We must determine what shape our Christian community should have if we are to tell the story of the new humanity that Christ has initiated through his death and universal outpouring of his Spirit.

In the previous section we considered the possibility that there was 'compromise' within the New Testament for the sake of the gospel. By suggesting a narrational approach I am also suggesting that we need to examine what it means in our day to be faithful to the ongoing story of God's redemption. We cannot claim to be faithful to the story by simply fulfilling the texts? the texts bear witness to a reality that goes beyond themselves.

3.8 Equal to serve

Gretchen Gaebelein Hull in her book *Equal to Serve*, says 'Secular feminism centres around gaining equal rights; biblical feminism centres around equal opportunity to serve.'⁴² Under the new covenant, it is not the outward shell that is important but the life within. Paul says the outward shell is wasting away (2 Corinthians 4:16) but the life within is eternal (4:18). It is the life source within which is important – this life source is none other than the promised Holy Spirit who is poured out on all flesh, irrespective of gender. The outward shell must extend to cover the issue of gender, for to see people restricted because of their gender is surely to take a worldly viewpoint.

As a result of the Fall, men and women became adversaries, competitors and even oppressors – instead of co-operators and joint administrators of our inheritance. In Christ this harmony is restored to us. Male and female can again jointly administrate the original commission God gave of bringing his rule to bear on the earth. In offering the same renewal and salvation to all? regardless of race, gender or class. He gives the same high calling, responsibility and privilege to all. Both male and female are equal ambassadors for Christ and his gospel (2 Corinthians 5:14-21), for both males and females are being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18, cf. Genesis 1:26-28).

If this is truly the situation that the gospel proclaims we should be provoked to ask why then does Paul, in particular, seem to restrict women. In other words we begin with the transforming power of the gospel, and **see the restrictive passages as exceptions rather than as the rule.**

⁴² (London: Scripture Union, 1987), p. 56.

2.2.1 The household codes (often called 'haustafeln')¹⁹

Codes defining how relationships were to be structured were very common in the ancient world, and the New Testament also presents codes which were closely modelled on those of secular society.²⁰ We could define these biblical codes as 'ethical duties which are addressed to specific classes of people specifying for them conduct that befits Christians in everyday life.'

One of the big questions that has been raised is how do the household codes, with an emphasis on submission, fit alongside the egalitarian Scriptures (ones which advocate freedom) of Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11? If all are equal before Christ why is there an emphasis on the submission of specific people to others? On the issue of slavery, it is interesting to note that the pro-slavery argument was simple: slaves were equal as far as acceptance before God was concerned, but as human equality is a myth, the institution of slavery is God-ordained, so as those who are gifted to lead can lead, and those who are inferior can find their fulfilment in being slaves to those who are superior. Those who argued this way wanted to believe that they could endorse slavery without denying equality; those who took an abolitionist stance wanted to abolish slavery without denying the need for leadership through gifting. This is a very similar situation we find ourselves in today over the case of women in leadership. Those who deny women the possibility of being leaders accept that women are equal, but insist that men have been appointed to lead – male leadership should then be exercised in a way that does not deny women equal status before God. Those who advocate the acceptance of women in leadership propose that to deny a gifted woman the right to serve in leadership is also to deny that she is equal to a man.

The household codes were part of ancient culture and it was Aristotle (fourth century BC) who introduced three pairs of relationships into the household codes; all of which were addressed to the man. He was addressed as a husband (husband/wife relationship); as a father (father/children); and as a master (master/slave). The man was addressed because he was the one who had the authority in these relationships. This threefold format was then adopted by other writers.

Roman aristocracy felt that their power base was being increasingly threatened by social changes around them. The upward mobility of socially inferior elements (former slaves, foreigners and women) were seen as a great threat. Foreign religions, in particular, were seen to be one of the main

¹⁹ The material in Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 131-224, and Padgett, 'The Pauline Rationale for Submission: Biblical Feminism and the hina Clauses of Titus 2:1-10' in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LIX, No. 1, (Jan. 1987), can be consulted to develop this discussion further. The German term 'haustafeln' is often used by theologians to describe these household codes.

²⁰ The fullest one is in Ephesians 5:21-6:9; there are also other occurrences of these codes in a less formalised and often shortened structure in other passages.

problems and the turning of a wife from her husband's religion was seen as a subversive ploy on the part of these foreign religions.

A wife ought not to make friends on her own, but to enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favour.²¹

Because foreign religions were viewed suspiciously in Rome, writers such as Josephus used the normal model of the household code to allay the suspicions of the Romans. He was at pains to show that Judaism was not a religion that would undermine Rome, but rather enhance Roman society. Josephus made use of the household code model for apologetic reasons, using the threefold division of those codes to demonstrate to Roman society how orthodox the Jewish people were in family practice.

Paul uses the exact same threefold division that was common to secular society and I believe a very strong case can be made to show that he also employs the codes for apologetic reasons. He uses the household code model as a defence for Christianity so as it could gain a better hearing in Roman society.

2.2.2 For evangelistic reasons

Paul emphasised a number of relationships and how they should be conducted in Titus 2. In that chapter he indicates he wants order in relationships particularly *for the sake of the gospel*. This consistently comes through in the passage (2:1-10). He addresses the behaviour of: women 'so that no-one will malign the word of God' (v. 5); young men 'so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us' (v. 8); and slaves 'so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive' (v. 10). We find a similar emphasis in 1 Timothy 6:1 in the context of masters and slaves, who are to behave in a befitting way toward each other 'so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered'. Likewise, Peter addresses wives and their behaviour toward their husbands 'so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words' (1 Pet. 3:1).

Paul, the believer in freedom, advocated that *believers should not use their freedom for their own ends but for the sake of the gospel*. True Christian freedom meant that he himself was willing to become obedient to authorities for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 10:31-33), and also willing to become all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

²¹ Plutarch quoted in Keener, *Paul*, p. 142.

If the church is to faithfully improvise it will need to puzzle over the previous acts in order to faithfully tell out the story.⁴⁰ The church then inherits the story and must set about its business of restoring to the owner the fruits of his vineyard. The church must immerse itself in the previous acts, for true Christianity cannot simply go and look up a set text to repeat parrot fashion as if it has found the answer. In that sense, right answers cannot be looked up; a good fifth act will not merely repeat what has gone before, but will bring it to a proper completion. Through this model there is also the need for the Spirit to inspire the community to faithfully live out the story that God initiated with creation. A good hermeneutic will require the current actors to faithfully interpret the story of the past and to re-interpret it into the contemporary scene.

Commenting on the authority of the New Testament, Wright gives an excellent summary, stating that:

In the Bible we find a drama in several acts... But the drama is not over. The way the NT is written is precisely open-ended... with a large blank to filled in by those who, as the heirs of the final scene in the fifth act, are seeking to advocate the drama, by means of Spirit-led improvisation, towards its appropriate conclusion. The authority of the NT, then, consists not least in this: that it calls us back to this story, this story of Jesus and Paul, as our story, as the non-negotiable point through which our pre-history runs, and which gives our present history its shape and direction.⁴¹

The Old Testament is the story of the earlier acts – these give us a vital understanding of what takes place in Act 4 (Jesus). In the light of this, it follows that the Old Testament cannot be the book of the covenant people of God in Christ in the same way that the New Testament is. The New Testament is written as the charter for the people of the creator God in the time between the first and second coming of Jesus (the conclusion of the play). There are boundary markers in the Old Testament which relate to the people of God when they were one nation, one geographical entity, with one racial and cultural identity, and the New Testament builds on the work of God as revealed in the Old Testament. The Old represents the preparatory work but now that the gospel has gone forth universally, it is the New Testament which is the charter for God's people.

Paul and the other first century Christians worked out what it meant for them to be faithful to the story in their day, we must remain faithful to the story in our day. If we tell another story we will become unbiblical – the Bible must operate as the authoritative guide to our story-telling. However it is also true that if we simply repeat scripts from an earlier act, or even an earlier scene within the

³⁹ *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Surely this is the meaning of Ephesians 2:10 'we are his artwork' (my translation) and are 'making known to the principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God' (3:10).

⁴¹ *Themelios*, Vol. 16.1, page 16.

So within Scripture there are stories, and there is also the macro-story that first Israel tells, and then the early church continues to tell but with Jesus having been placed at the centre.

3.7.1 *The five-act play*

N. T. Wright gives a very helpful model to understand the unfolding of revelation within the canon of Scripture.³⁸ Firstly, he establishes that it is God himself who gives to Scripture its authority, and that the Bible is an unfolding of God's activity in different and progressive acts.

He gives a helpful analogy of a supposed unfinished five act play of Shakespeare. He asks us to imagine the play as incomplete as the larger part of the final act has been lost. Through this analogy the first four completed acts form the authority for all that follows and all subsequent characters must 'act' and 'speak' in ways that are consistent with what has already gone before. The first four acts (biblically) are Creation, the Fall, the history of Israel and Jesus. An understanding of the story will then shape the world view of the readers / hearers (or perhaps better the 'viewer' as the story must be seen). Under this model Act 3 would finish with John the Baptist proclaiming that there is one to come who will be the Lamb of God, the baptiser in the Spirit. With bated breath the viewer is asked to watch the fourth act unfold as the God of all creation is revealed in the Person of Jesus. The fourth act then concludes with the death of Christ, with the fifth act opening to the resurrection scene, the outpouring of the Spirit and the mission of the church.

The above acts correspond with the Scriptures as we have them; Scripture substantially ends with the beginning of the fifth act along with some indications as to the end of that act (Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 15, parts of Revelation such as 21-22). The story becomes the authority for all who want to participate in it, and yet it remains incomplete. Using this analogy to introduce people to the larger story, I have commented that such an approach leaves three possible options: 1) to reduce the story we have to the level of interesting ancient literature where a 'museum' (spelt 'church'?) could be erected in honour of the writing. Readings could be made from the book, discussions of its quality and historical credibility could be most informative: yet the dynamic authority of the book would be lost. 2) The 'missing' elements of act 5 could be filled in with authoritative writers who could so fill in the gaps that those who sought to live by the story would know how to act and react in any given situation. However, the people would no longer be on a journey of discovery (and mistake), they would simply be a people of the book and of tradition. 3) The third option is the one that Wright advocates where the church would be 'required to offer an improvisatory performance of the final act as it leads up to and anticipates the intended conclusion'.³⁹

³⁸ The Laing Lecture / the Griffith Thomas Lecture, 1989. The text is published in *Vox Evangelica*, Vol. XXI (1991), pp. 7-32. The model is reproduced in his *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress; London: SPCK, 1992), p. 140f.

Seen against this apologetic background the ethics of the household codes are 'not a falling away from the Pauline position but the working out of what it means to be saved in the midst of the world.' They are 'the temporary marching orders for the church, so that the gospel could go forth.'²²

The household codes then fit the pattern of contextualisation that one would expect in a mission-minded person such as Paul. However, he does not simply accept the norms of society for he also considerably adapts the household codes.

2.2.3 *The transformation of the household codes*

If Paul used the framework of the household codes for apologetic reasons, we also note that he radically transformed those codes. He never advocated that believers compromised their freedom to the extent of secular society. The equality that was theirs through the gospel was not to be completely thrown away.

Unlike the secular codes, he avoids using the terms 'obeying' and 'ruling' with regard to wives and husbands. He is happy to use the term 'submission', for such behaviour should characterise all Christians, and therefore was totally appropriate behaviour for a wife. He also sets the submission of the wife in a context: an immediate context of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and an overall context of being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).²³ And unlike the secular codes, he also addresses both parties: thus he refuses to endorse the idea that only the husband had authority.

However, it is the content of the codes that indicate how radical he is. He fills them with love and service, each party to the other, in such a way that the codes are radically transformed. Submission does not become the duty of the wife alone, any more than love is only required of the man! Far from defining headship in terms of rule and authority, he draws upon the model of Christ's self-sacrificial giving.²⁴ He instructs the wife to recognise her husband as her

²² Padgett, 'Rationale', p. 52.

²³ Grudem & Piper (eds.), *Manhood*, pp. 198-201, suggest that 'submission to one another' does not mean mutual submission, but that it is an overall phrase talking of submission within relationships, that are then explained by the examples that Paul proceeds to give. By so doing they indicate that, in their opinion, husbands should not be in submission to their wives. This interpretation of 'one another' would be very different to every other occurrence of it within Paul – including the immediate context of speaking to one another (verse 19). The worship and the submission all flow directly out of being filled with the Spirit. The relationships are governed not by some form of hierarchy but by the believers' 'reverence for Christ'.

²⁴ Although Christ is Lord over the church, it is not this aspect of Christ's relationship to the church that Paul compares to the relationship of the husband to the wife. We must not push the illustration beyond where Paul intended it. We cannot, for instance, draw the bizarre conclusion that the husband is divine and the wife is not. The husband/wife relationship should mirror that of Christ and the church on this issue of partnership with the husband seeking to emulate the self-sacrificial love of Jesus. Using the term 'head'

head and submit; the man, he instructs, to recognise that this description of head is a call to sacrificial love and service on behalf of his wife. By fulfilling such instructions there will be a mutuality, a true unity (Ephesians 5:31).

So although he uses the household code pattern for apologetic reasons, he so fills it with Christian content that the only way they can be outworked successfully is to be filled with the Spirit, embracing a spirit of humility and submission to one another. To use such household codes to establish a divinely appointed order of hierarchy would be to ignore both the spirit and content of those codes. For the husband to demand his right to rule would be to act in an un-Christian way; for the wife to seek to get her way would be to dishonour the One who bought her. Paul is not endorsing male hierarchy, nor even encouraging equal rights – rather he is insisting that believers lay down their rights for one another. ***The passage then is not about equal rights but about mutual submission.***

Where does that leave things as far as leadership within the home is concerned? That is the challenge that Paul leaves the Christian couple with. The mystery of Christ and the church is that only in partnership with the church is Christ going to get his will done. The church and Christ remain distinct, but what Christ has done is for the church (Ephesians 1:21-23) so that the will of God might be done through the church (Ephesians 3:10). If domineering male headship is resorted to there is a falling short from the partnership that God intends, with husband and wife demonstrating one flesh unity. To fall back to such a hierarchical position is to move from where Paul would have us focus. He focuses both husband and wife on the Spirit's enabling, Christ's presence and Christ's example, so that each might adopt a self-sacrificial life on behalf of the other. To resort to a hierarchy might, at times, be necessary but in reality only indicates our immaturity. The household codes, as laid out by Paul, are not simply secular codes that have been revamped: they are Christian codes. By accepting them as an enduring example of self-giving submissive attitudes, God will be honoured. However, we cannot use them to insist on a hierarchy.

Excursus: Household codes and 'creation order'

It is worth noting that Paul never appeals to creation order as the basis of submission. The context for the household codes is apologetic (for the sake of the Gospel) but the content is modelled on Christ himself. With regard to male/female relationships, Paul only appeals to creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8f. and in 1 Timothy 2:12ff. In the Corinthian passage he is quick to make sure that we do not carry his argument too far by emphasising that 'in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman'. So even when resorting to creation he is quick to prevent his readers from deriving too much from his argument.²⁵

does not justify the husband in lording it over his wife.

²⁵ For a discussion on the Corinthian passage and in particular to the historic style of Paul's argument see Keener, *Paul*, pp. 19-69.

perhaps unseen.³⁷ Our worldview is basically our story of what the world is all about. Stories have the power to confirm, inform, instruct, or challenge our worldview(s) and, as a result, our whole lives. Worldviews are shaped through the stories (even nursery rhymes can shape a world view) and the interpretation of events, so much so that the interpretation and re-interpretation of history is always a key issue in shaping a worldview and in forming a society. The history of the British empire can be victorious or disastrous: dependent on how the story is told.

Jesus often told stories (parables) to subvert commonly held perspectives. Before him, Nathan the prophet used the power of story to great effect to open David's life to the presence of God. He told a story of a rich man, a poor man and a little lamb. It was only a story yet the story sufficiently paralleled David's recent misdemeanour that his whole perception was changed.

On the national level, Israel had a story that she re-told in order to bring to remembrance that she was chosen by God from all the nations of the earth; throughout her history she re-told the activities of the heroes who had gone before, they were there to be emulated, and their mistakes were to be avoided. The final editor of Deuteronomy to Kings (the so-called Deuteronomic historian) tells her or his story from the perspective of Israel as a stiff-necked nation, whose sin is threatening the covenant, and that she is in danger of going into exile. Such a story telling adds up to a radical prophetic call to repent. The story-telling is as prophetic as the explicit declarations of judgement that come through such prophets as Amos.

The early church also perceived the power of story. The Old Testament narratives were written to shape *our* lives (1 Corinthians 10:11-12), and behind the NT narratives themselves a story is being told. Jesus, the great story-teller, uses a well-known story of the vineyard: the original story is from Isaiah 5. It is the story of Israel and speaks of the tragedy of her failure to respond to the love of God. Jesus uses this story as the basis for a re-telling (see Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19), and he retells it in such a way that the intensity of the tragedy becomes even more obvious. In the Old Testament, Israel is viewed as the son, yet in the re-telling of this story there is a son who is finally sent to the vineyard. Israel's story is being retold, but the central new character in the story is *the* son. The response to the son is portrayed as the absolute key in the 'success' or indeed failure of Israel to be fruitful in its mission.

An understanding of story is essential as it underlines that the revelation of God is essentially historical and not propositional. Scripture records that there is an unfolding of the revelation of God within the historical experience of God's people. The story reaches its climax, of course, in the revelation that took place in the life and activities of Jesus.

³⁷ I am using the term 'story' here in a technical sense and not in the popular sense of something that is not true. The story of Scripture is a telling of events from a perspective. The events are interpreted to communicate values and shape a worldview.

for example, there is no adverse comment on the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila, nor regarding Philip's four daughters prophesying. If there is unity in Christ and a universal outpouring of the Spirit, regardless of gender, we should expect women to be functioning alongside men. At times a descriptive text has a comment attached, such as we find in the reference to the circumcision of Timothy. This practice seems strange in the light of there being 'no Jew nor Greek' in Christ with circumcision being a boundary marker from the old covenant, so it is most helpful that an explanation is given for this clear exception to the 'rule'. The third category is that of the **corrective** text. These are texts that deal with special situations, problems or misunderstandings within the church, and all the key restrictive passages fit this category. This is not to say that there is no teaching within them, but that any teaching is being specifically applied to a particular situation that needs adjusting. We would have to be very clear indeed to universalise such texts and give them precedence over instructive texts.

I am not implying that we can simply dismiss descriptive or corrective texts as irrelevant, but I am suggesting that they must be subservient to the instructive texts.

3.6 Recognise that we need to apply Scripture consistently

There is a challenge to apply Scripture consistently. If Paul's use of the headship illustration in 1 Corinthians 11 is not advanced to restrict women in ministry but to insist that they cover their heads, we are then left with a question as to what is normative for all ages: 'should women today have their heads covered?' If we allow women to be present without covering their heads, but restrict them from ministry (and by so doing reverse Paul's instructions) we must be clear on the basis for such practise. Philip Payne suggests that, 'It is inconsistent simply to assume on the one hand that it is normative for women never to teach or be in authority over men, but on the other hand to dismiss as not normative Paul's comments about braids, gold, pearls, expensive clothes, and raised hands in prayer.'³⁶

If, as most do, we dismiss certain instructions as cultural, but retain others within the same passages as ongoing, we will need a clear hermeneutic to do so. Better rather to see that there is a cultural background to the whole New Testament that colours the various instructions that Paul and others give. This aspect raises an issue which is in part hermeneutical but also belongs to the larger picture relating to the nature of Scripture itself.

3.7 A narratival approach to Scripture

There has been a major rediscovery that most of the Scriptural material we have is in the form of story – narrative rather than laws, oracles or systematic theology. 'Story' is actually something that is present for all of us, although

³⁶ Philip B. Payne, 'Libertarian Women at Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo's Article...', *Trinity Journal*, Vol. 2 NS, No. 2 (1981), p. 175.

End of Excursus

2.2.4 The freedom of Galatians 3:28

Paul adopts the household codes for apologetic reasons, and in doing so it can appear that he 'compromises' his gospel of freedom. We do, however, see Paul working out his gospel of freedom and equality in different contexts. He addresses Jew and Gentile unity in the Galatian context; men and women having equal rights in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; the reciprocal authority within marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; the slavery issue with Philemon (who is to receive Onesimus back no longer as a slave, but as a brother (Philemon 16)) and also in the household code in his letter to the Ephesians, where he instructs masters to 'treat your slaves in the same way'.

2.2.5 Summary

Paul is radical in how he applies Christ's freedom to the relationships of his day. He uses great apologetic wisdom by employing the accepted household codes of his society, but he refuses to adopt cultural norms. He particularly transforms the relationship between husbands and wives, and masters and slaves. His radical demands mean that he has sown the seeds that will eventually dismantle the institution of slavery and, it would seem, the ultimate demise of patriarchy in church structure and relationships. Anything less will be less than Christian.

It is now that we turn to the argument put forward that there is a very big difference between the example of slavery and the marriage relationship. It is interesting that the current argument (that there is a difference of order between these two sets of relationships) is to insist on something which the pro-slavery group did not understand. They understood that any undermining of the master/slave relationship automatically would mean that male leadership was also undermined. They saw the two sets of relationship as directly parallel to each other. It is to this discussion that we now turn.

2.3 Slavery is cultural; male / female relationships are creational

There are those who argue that the similarity between the emancipation of slaves and freedom for women is superficial. One is reflective of fallen culture; the other is reflective of creation order. Slavery is to do with social order; submission of women/wives is to do with the way God intended things to be.²⁶ The argument continues that any idea of mutual submission is nonsense for parents are not told to submit to their children, thus what we have outlined in Ephesians are fixed relationships.

²⁶ It is noted that nowhere are women told to submit to men; nor that men are head over women. The term 'head' is only ever used in a marriage context. If there is to be any specific subordination it can therefore only be restricted to marriage. This is a point that those who advocate the hierarchical position consistently fail to grasp.

In reply I point out that the wife/husband relationship is set in the context of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21), and to take Paul's language any other way is to distort the plain Pauline and contextual meaning of the phrase. Likewise he brings a reciprocal element into the master/slave relationship by instructing masters to 'treat your slaves the same way' (Ephesians 6:9). However, he makes no such requirement within the parent/child relationship. He does not set these three sets of relationships on equal terms, but what is clear is that it is the master/ slave relationship, rather than the parent/child relationship, that is treated as closer in analogy to that of husband/wife.

The reasons for submission in ancient society were: inferior power, economic dependence and less knowledge. In ancient society this meant that it was to the man that all submitted – wives, children and slaves. For this reason the traditional household codes only addressed the men. Children come under a very different category to that of slaves and wives, both latter categories consisting of adults and so capable of independent survival. It would be ludicrous for Paul to insist on mutual submission for parents and children; this not only goes against divine order but common sense!

The real issue is not whether marriage is a God-ordained relationship and slavery is not. Indeed, there are really two issues at stake here: first, what kind of marriage is God-ordained? Is submission simply one-way? From Paul's teaching, the Genesis picture pre-fall, and the emphasis on unity within marriage, such a view would be hard to substantiate. The second, and very key, issue is to discover in what sense the coming of Christ has actually transformed creation. Redemption does not simply restore creation to how it was. In Christ creation finds its destiny fulfilled, it reaches its end in the one who is the Beginning and the End. Christ is the Last Adam and as such has come to inaugurate a new humanity that is manifest even within this fallen age. We might not yet be like him, but in Christ there is no male and female.²⁷

Slavery and marriage are of a different order. However domination and hierarchy are of the same order. They belong to the order that is passing away, believers are to live in a way that models the coming age of glory.

Excursus: Marriage and order

Although this is not a paper on marriage, in the light of using the household codes as an example of relationships being ordered for apologetic reasons, it is worth giving some indication as to how the marriage relationship should be ordered.

As far as men and women in relationship together is concerned, it is only in the marriage relationship that we find women are asked to submit to their husbands. This occurs in the context of the household codes which we

²⁷ I suggest that in Gal. 3:28 Paul uses the term 'not male and female' quite deliberately, indicating that redemption even transcends creation realities (cf. also 1 Cor. 11:11 'however, in the Lord...').

moving forward we will need the discipline of hearing the apparent conflicting voices that Scripture gives on this particular subject. We must be careful not to silence one of the voices too quickly. Again in making a comparison with the slavery issue, we can note that there are voices that clearly lead us in a different direction to those that seemed to endorse slavery. Paul condemned slave traders (1 Timothy 1:9f.); he sent Philemon back, not only as a slave, but as a brother (Philemon 16); John condemned the traders in Babylon (Rome) who traded in people as well as goods (Revelation 18:13). We would be in grave danger of silencing voices that speak of freedom if we simply amassed restrictive passages together, on slavery or on women.

As well as interpreting unclear texts in the light of clear ones, we need to interpret specific practices in the light of overriding theological and moral principles. This was one of the appeals that those who argued for the abolition of slavery made. If all human beings are created equally in the image of God, they argued, then any institution that allowed for domination or the ownership of someone else had to be seen to be in opposition to the doctrine of God as creator (and redeemer, of course).

3.4 Recognise that we should not make Scripture say more than it does

For example, to take the word 'helper' (Gen. 2:20) to imply subordination would be to fall into this trap. As far as the key restrictive passages are concerned we need to determine why Paul appeals to creation in 1 Corinthians 11 or 1 Timothy 2. So, in the former passage, his appeal to creation is not to advocate male supremacy but to argue that a woman should be covered. Similarly, although he uses the concept 'head', he does not use this to develop some form of hierarchy or as a means to restrict women in their function. In the latter passage, Paul does not conclude that all women are more easily deceived than men. This could be the reason for the reference to Eve but Paul himself does not specifically state that position. We must resist the temptation of making the text fit any preconceived ideas and we might have to admit that, in the final analysis, we do not know why Paul makes some of his statements. (This is not too unlikely in the light of 2 Peter 3:16!)

3.5 Recognise that teaching texts take precedence over both descriptive and corrective texts

Manfred Brauch, in *Hard Sayings of Paul*,³⁵ draws attention to three categories of New Testament Scriptures: instructive (or normative) texts, descriptive texts, and corrective texts. The *instructive* texts are those which declare how things ought to be among the followers of Christ. Such texts are didactic and are often based on clear theology related to the redemption that is ours in Christ.

Descriptive texts describes practices or actions in the church. When these come without any comment they normally accord with the instructive texts. So

³⁵ (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 20f. In this classification he is acknowledging a debt to an essay by S. Scott Bartchy.

the specific context that Paul was addressing. Therefore he could not accept these verses as having universal application.

To state that all biblical passages are for all time, does not mean that all biblical passages are for all circumstances. In the case of the Timothy passage mentioned above, we would want to discover the factors involved in Paul's statement in order to learn from the apostle, rather than making it into a universal restriction against women teaching.

3.3 Recognise that unclear texts should be interpreted in the light of clear ones

Each of the key restrictive passages present the interpreter with specific challenges. Powell says that they 'are significantly among the most difficult in the NT, including a number of *hapax legomena* and verses such as 1 Timothy 2:15, which still awaits a really convincing exegesis.'³¹ In the case of the verses that tell women not to talk in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-36) there is the further complication as to whether these verses were ever intended to be part of the canonical writings at all!

These comments should temper a statement such as that made by Stephen Clark who chooses 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as an interpretative centre on the question of appropriate roles for women. He writes, '1 Timothy 2:8-15 is one of the most important texts to consider in any examination of the New Testament on the roles of men and women.'³² We can contrast his interpretative centre with that of F. F. Bruce who places Galatians 3:28 at the centre. He writes, 'Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus... they are to be understood in relation to Galatians 3:28 and not vice versa.'³³

In the light of the fact that the key restrictive passages are not as clear as might first appear, Powell draws attention to a text that is seldom referred to in the debate. She notes that there are few references in the debate to 'unequivocal texts such as Colossians 3:16 which clearly states that teaching is the responsibility of all believers. Gender is simply not specified, and neither is it anywhere assumed that some teaching is more authoritative than other teaching within the church body, or that a formal sermon slot in church is different from teaching outside a church environment.'³⁴

The choosing of clear texts and therefore an interpretative centre is an important factor, as our starting point will in part determine our conclusion. In

³¹ Claire Powell, 'A stalemate of genders? Some hermeneutical reflections', *Themelios*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (April / May, 1992), p. 17. A hapax legomenon (Powell has used the plural form) is a term that describes a particular word (in the case of the restrictive texts, a Greek word) that is only used on that one occasion within the NT.

³² *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1990), pp. 191f.

³³ *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), p. 384.

³⁴ Powell, 'Stalemate', p. 17.

understand to be, at least in part, apologetically motivated. This raises the question whether we have in them a fixed order for all time.

In Ephesians 5:22-33 Paul does not argue for a fixed order on the basis of creation but does compare the husband/wife relationship to that of Christ and the church. This might indicate some sort of divine order in marriage. If so, however, the model is not one of domineering but of self-sacrificial giving, and the goal of the relationship is harmonious unity.

What is important in marriage is for both partners to agree on their concept of headship as they enter marriage. A gentle form of male headship is suggested by Dennis McCallum and Gary DeLashmutt, that makes for a reasonable starting point for discussion within marriage. They suggest that,

A woman who submits to the servant leadership of a mature Christian man should be letting herself in for a life where her husband devotes himself to providing for her needs, protecting her and (yes) directing her at times. A servant leader will not insist on his way where it is not possible to know objectively what God wants. He will call for his wife to follow Christ along with himself, but will graciously allow her to refuse his suggestions often. Like Jesus, he will not compel obedience, but will seek to win it through persuasion and love.²⁸

Alongside mutual submission in marriage, the ideal is that no marriage should be closed to the comments of, and help from, other members of the body of Christ that a couple are in relationship with. When a husband and wife end up unable to resolve an issue themselves it is best to invite others in to help resolve the best way forward. If agreement still can't be reached, McCallum and DeLashmutt suggest it is the husband's prerogative to hold through for his view, or to choose to sacrificially yield to his wife's view. (Assuming that neither choice can be labelled 'sin'.) The decision by the husband in leading or in yielding must be done with a wholehearted commitment to the marriage by both husband and wife.

End of Excursus

2.4 For the sake of the gospel

Having looked at the ordering of relationships within the New Testament and the household codes in their historic setting, I suggest there is evidence that women were sometimes restrained from giving total expression to the freedom that was theirs in Christ. This was not from theological grounds grounded in the creation narratives, thus indicating an inequality between the genders, but **only for apologetic reasons**. Hence in applying Scriptures that seem to restrict women, or ones that give a fixed order of men and women relating

²⁸ From 'Men, Women and Gender Roles in Marriage' a paper adapted from their *The Myth of Romance* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1996), and released on the Web site [<http://www.xenos.org/books/mythmw.htm>].

together (as seen in the household codes), we should not necessarily feel that they are binding in exactly the way laid out. For them to be binding they would need to clearly reflect creation order, the freedom of the gospel and be completely free of any apologetic or corrective element.

A. F. Johnson has caught this aspect when he suggests that just as God's word would have been dishonoured in New Testament times by wives not submitting to their husbands, it is dishonoured today when outsiders come into a male-dominated church that seems to suppress women.²⁹ In other words, as for Paul, we must be apologetically motivated as we seek to implement the freedom that Christ has purchased, and should be aware that the outworking of that freedom will differ from culture to culture.

In closing this section, I would like to deal with one concern that is often raised. It is sometimes suggested that those who advocate freedom for women are simply following the lead given by the world. I suggest this needs to be responded to in two ways. First, we need to acknowledge that God is sovereign and therefore is at work in the world. If it was secular society that first raised its voice regarding freedom for women, this does not necessarily indicate that God was not involved in this concern. Second, the issue remains that once a concern has been raised (whether inside or outside the church) that Jesus is the one who is followed. In other words, society can raise an issue (another example might be that of ecology) but the redeemed community must then determine whether God is speaking and what it means to follow Christ.

So in the example of ecology, I suggest that Christians should not be responding because we are in danger of running out of resources, but because this is God's earth and we are to take care of it. Society might have 'flagged' the issue, but we then need to follow Christ. The same might have been true with respect to women. As Christians we must model what he taught on equality, rather than simply adopt society's agenda.

This section has opened up a key hermeneutical issue, that, for the sake of the gospel, certain freedoms might well be best restricted. The next section will address other hermeneutical issues. In reality, hermeneutical issues are at the centre of the debate over the place of women in society and the church. It is not simply *what* the various texts say, but *why* they say what they say, and *how* they should be applied in our setting, that should determine the way forward.

3. Hermeneutical Issues

On our day together this might well be an area that we want to explore further and the headlines below are simply that – headlines that could be expanded considerably.

²⁹ 'Response' in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, Alvera Mickelsen (ed.) (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), p. 157.

3.1 Recognise the inadequacy of a 'flat book' approach

There is a tendency among those who understand the Bible to teach a restriction on women and their roles, to use the Bible in a particular way. This method is often described as a 'flat book' approach. By this phrase, it is meant that there is a greater emphasis placed on quoting what the Bible says irrespective of the culture or other factors. The cumulation of texts can then be used to prove the particular point. This was the approach that was used to defend the right of Christians to have slaves: effectively what was argued was that they had Scripture on their side.

The danger of this approach can lead us to the place where institutions are defended because they are in the Bible, although the nature of the institution itself can be seen to fall short of the human interrelationships that the gospel envisaged. So although at first appearing biblical, it leads to a misuse of the Bible. It is for this reason that I suggest we need to place greater weight on the activity of Jesus and the freedom that results from the deliverance the gospel brings.

3.2 Recognise that historical and cultural settings are important

It is important that weight is given to the background setting of the texts we are dealing with. Again, the slavery debate is a useful one to cite as it illustrates this principle so well. Those who stood for the abolition of slavery argued that slavery was part of ancient culture and that the law did not endorse slavery as such, but rather the law accepted the situation as a fact of society but then moved the culture for the covenant people toward protection and freedom for slaves. The law did not abolish slavery but improved the situation. However, given a new setting, the only appropriate Christian way forward was to endorse abolition.

Paul, and Pauline texts, are rightly given a great deal of weight among those who give the Bible authority on doctrine and practise, but it is important to note that Paul's letters were not written as creedal statements or works of systematic theology. All of his letters were dependent on the situation he was writing to. This is not to say that the contingent nature of the letters means that they do not contain theology, but to recognise that they were written to **a specific situation at a specific time**. The letters therefore need to be seen against their primary context and then re-contextualised for ours. This factor is what lay behind F. F. Bruce's response to the question, 'How do you interpret 1 Timothy 2:9-15, which suggest that women are not to teach?' His entire recorded reply was, 'It is merely a statement of practice at a particular time.'³⁰ This author of over 40 books could dismiss these verses so quickly because of

³⁰ This interview of Bruce by W. Ward Gasque and Laurel Gasque was entitled 'F. F. Bruce: A Mind for What Matters' and appeared in *Christianity Today* (April 7, 1989), pp. 22-25.