



# Understanding the Complementarian Position:

*Considering Implications and Exploring Practices  
in the Home and the Local Church*

January 18-20, 2012  
Deerfield, IL

A special edition of The Ministerial Forum  
Fall 2012 Vol. 20 No. 2



## **Understanding the Complementarian Position: Considering Implications and Exploring Practices in the Home and the Local Church**

This year's annual EFCA Theology Conference was held at Trinity International University and focused on the complementarian position regarding the respective roles of men and women in the home and in the church. Two respected New Testament scholars, Don Carson, currently at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Bob Yarbrough, formerly at TEDS and now at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, made presentations before some 265 attendees. Three panels composed of men and women with diverse roles in the local church also discussed ways in which these themes are worked out in various settings.<sup>1</sup>

### **Opening Remarks: President Bill Hamel**

The conference was framed by the opening remarks of EFCA President Bill Hamel. He first affirmed that complementarianism is our EFCA position regarding the credentialing of men and women for the ministry of the gospel. This was established by a vote at the 1988 General Conference declaring that ordination would be for men only, a position spelled out in the document *Steps Toward Credentialing*. This Theology Conference was designed to help us understand the complementarian position biblically, while exploring various ways that it might be implemented practically in our EFCA churches.

Dr. Hamel then reflected on our history on this issue. A few women were ordained by the Free Church before 1950, but they were mostly ordained to the ministries of evangelism or missions. Since the merger in 1950 there have been no national ordinations of women. The *Steps Toward Credentialing* document from 1988, though reserving ordination for men, also recognized and affirmed women in ministry by offering a Christian Ministry License for those serving in qualifying vocational ministries. To be clear, this policy refers only to the national EFCA credential. Our congregational polity allows local churches to do as they wish in this regard. Further, we do not preclude those men who hold an egalitarian position regarding men and women in ministry from being ordained within the EFCA.

The EFCA General Conference has determined that we are complementarian in our practice of ordination. We will teach it humbly yet without apology, because we believe it is what the Bible teaches. We are also determined to work hard at

---

<sup>1</sup>Audio recordings and related documents from the 2012 Theology Conference are available on the EFCA website (<http://www.efca.org/church-health/pastoral-care-staff-benefits/efca-theology-conference>).

discerning humbly and charitably what that means in practice at home and in the local church.

Dr. Hamel acknowledged that, sadly, there is a sentiment that the EFCA is not favorable to women. For some, that perception is based on true, real-life instances; for others, only on hearsay. This conference is also designed to hear and address perceptions, both real and imagined, and to change the negative impression that exists among some. Our president called us to listen, learn and discuss, and to do so submitting to God and his Word, seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit and committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lordship of Christ, and love for one another.

## **The Cultural and Ecclesiological Landscape**

Robert W. Yarbrough

Dr. Yarbrough opened our conference by addressing the broader theme of the cultural context in which we live and minister. He structured his lecture around five themes and a closing question.

### **1. We're hurting.**

Yarbrough began with a theme which dominated much of his presentation: We are a culture undergoing a slow-motion social train wreck. No ministry model and no view of family and ordination has been able to stop these trends. The changes in our culture we have seen in the last generation have had a devastating effect, destroying the lives of many.

### **2. The term "complementarian" needs a re-do.**

"Complementarianism" as an understanding of men and women as both equal in dignity and value and different in role and responsibility is entirely biblical. Hence *complementarian* has become a label for those seeking to retain certain things core to each gendered personhood and to marriage as given by God, and to highlight aspects of both sexes that are distinct and not shared in the same ways and to the same degrees. In this view, as only males are husbands and fathers in the marital household according to the Scriptures, only males are normally appointed congregational leaders in the New Testament.

The complementarian pattern is broader still. To adapt some words from David Chapman, throughout Scripture we see "women and men jointly constituting the image of God and commissioned to rule creation, women fully involved in the worshipping community in song, prayer, praise, and prophecy (though not as doctrinal teachers or pastoral preachers), women involved in serving in and initiating a host of other ministries, yet women not acting as priests, kings, apostles, or elders."

In the cultural landscape of which we are a part in America, various forces are waging war on the Bible's understanding of personhood (e.g., abortion on demand) and marriage and by extension biblical teaching on congregational leadership. We are presented with a notion of "progress" that demands that we abandon the long-held traditions of the past and embrace new models for human prospering. But when Christ talked about the marriage covenant in his own time—"from the beginning it was not so"—he did not explain it as a socially evolving human convention. Like Scripture generally, Jesus, as he is quoted on this topic, was culturally conditioned and situated, but he was not culturally bound or determined. His words speak truth for us today.

Because of its bad connotations for many, perhaps the label "complementarian" now has a limited usefulness. We need repentance and fresh approaches in many ways. Yet the fulcrum that elevates Christian understanding to truths about male and female in domestic union and in ecclesial cooperation—that fulcrum is in the Bible where we find Christ, not beyond or outside it where he never pointed us.

### 3. Redoing "complementarianism"

Though "complementarianism" expresses biblical truth, it has not always been practiced biblically. The term has been a banner under which many things have proceeded that we agree are repugnant. A renovation of "complementarianism" calls for repentance of past sins and a new appreciation of the gospel life to which we are called in the relationships of men and women.

Unfortunately, complementarianism has often been simply about what women "can't do." It is perceived as limiting and constricting. We need to present it more positively as an expression of the good purposes of God and the way in which God, in his grace and love, designed human relationships forged in the gospel to flourish.

Complementarianism has too often meant catering our ministry primarily to men and ignoring the distinctive needs of women. Worse still, it has served as a cover for the oppression of women. There are too many cases where men in churches escaped confrontation and church discipline while their wives received no help or not enough of it. We hear of crony capitalism. How about crony complementarianism? It exists, and it is intolerable.

Sometimes complementarianism has been wed to Americanism and "family values," and been divorced from the biblical demands of loving leadership and humble submission. We dare not let the *polis* define what the head of the *ecclesia*, Christ, and Holy Scripture see quite differently. One consequence is that where complementarianism is not defined in a robustly biblical way, it fails to repel licentiousness. A fleshly rule-oriented complementarianism will tend to ugly effects in the name of enforcing God's law and too often has. Sin, sometimes heinous, is the inevitable result.

Complementarianism should seek to promote respect and sibling warmth among men and women in the church. It should encourage a delightful synergy of cooperation, of mutual respect, of pastoral promotion of women and a promotion of their God-given interests, skills and responsibilities. Too often it produces suspicion, defensiveness, exclusion, or indifference and downright juvenile and boorish behavior. Jesus' attitudes and relationships with women ought to be a model for us, for he evoked deep loyalty and admiration from them, and not because he was a skill for liberationist ideals.

Finally, Yarbrough contended, complementarianism has been used to justify male aggression and laziness and refusal to love and serve in marriages. In the light of Paul's clear instruction in Ephesians 5:25-33, this ought not to be.

Though surely egalitarian thought opens up a Pandora's box of woes, it cannot be denied that one feature of our cultural and ecclesial landscape is warped, bastard expressions of male malfeasance, garbed as complementarian, that are static and smug and an accessory to evil. It is hoped that an effect of this conference will be to energize us in the direction of marriages and churches and pastoral character and practices more truly suffused with the whole counsel of God and with the Holy Spirit of his love and grace. Men must see that modeled in male leaders. Women must deeply feel that their male leaders are on their side. They must see that their leaders treasure their children, that they are helping them actualize their gifts and calling, and that they are praying for them and making decisions with their concerns clearly in view.

#### **4. Dizzying and Despairing Cultural Change**

The rapid changes we see in our culture are sometimes overwhelming. Ours is a culture that increasingly stands internationally for what used to be called sexual perversion. It seems to be a culture of no restraint. Ours is a culture of substance abuse and a lack of constructive purpose in life, loneliness and boredom such that drug stupor unto death is a gamble many are willing to take. Ours is a culture of increasing suppression of even hints of Christian conviction. Ours is a culture of shocking brutality. Numerous examples illustrate all of these claims.

One important hermeneutical principle emerges from this journey across our cultural landscape. We lack empirical grounds to say that society is getting better, or is more humane, or is more sophisticated, such that we can regard biblical teaching as an artifact of a culturally inferior era. As modern Westerners, we cannot presume to judge the biblical ethic from some morally superior viewpoint.

#### **5. God is our Hope**

Though the bad news is real, it is not all the news. God is still at work in our world and in our churches. Where there is God, there is hope. We mustn't overdo

doom-and-gloom assessments of the landscape. We all have victory stories from the ministry-front to tell. The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's followers.

### **A Final Question**

Is our church order an apt vehicle for administering God's grace in the church by the gospel of our crucified, risen, ascended, reigning, and returning Lord? It is, but we can and must grow in understanding and true holiness.

Andrew Root in his review of the Christian Smith book, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, writes:

It became starkly clear as I read this important book that significant suffering and emptiness exist under the surface optimism of this cohort of young people. Individualism, boredom, sexual hurt and fear of admitting regret all point to the need for the church to use its theological imagination to speak of a God who meets us in our doubt and suffering when our shell of optimism is too fragile to hold our being. A theology of the cross that seeks God in the honest reflection of our own broken narratives comes to be of particular importance.

The cross must inform complementarian outlooks to bring light to the dark side of emerging adulthood, and light to all the other demographic subdivisions that make up congregations looking to their pastors for help

---

## **Hermeneutics: A Biblical Framework**

**Robert W. Yarbrough**

In his second lecture, Dr. Yarbrough addressed two questions with the goal of furnishing a collage of biblical considerations that support what he might call a chastened complementarian view. This is a view aware of its past inadequacies and abuses, eager to reconfigure in the light of better scriptural understanding and less complicity in fleshly cultural tendencies that bedevil especially males. Through a discussion of these questions, he hoped to strengthen our interpretive framework for reading the Bible in such a way as to understand and to implement its truth in more godly ways.

## 1. Why Stick with Complementarianism?

Dr. Yarbrough first asked, Why not go with the flow of our culture and 1) recognize men and women equally as ordination candidates, and 2) declare outmoded the notion of male leadership and wives' deference in the family unit? Of course one could just reply, "Because that's not what the Bible teaches," and that response will be considered below. But Yarbrough first offered four other considerations—ecclesial, empirical, hermeneutical, and evangelistic—that caution us from moving from away from complementarianism.

### A. An Ecclesial Reason

To ordain women and dismantle biblical marriage organization would be to break fellowship with at least two-thirds of the world church. Roughly 60 percent of Christians in the world are Roman Catholic and roughly 10 percent Eastern Orthodox. There is no indication that either of these communions will embrace anytime soon the views of women common in the secular West, in the Protestant mainline, and in some pockets of egalitarian conviction elsewhere. Protestant and independent Christian communions and denominations like the EFCA should be loath to break ranks with Catholic and Orthodox understanding at this key point of ecclesial understanding, in the same way that we affirm with them the christological doctrines articulated in the first four ecumenical councils.

Of the remaining 30 percent of the world church, which is largely Protestant, only a small minority ordain women and encourage wives and husbands to abandon the biblical notion of male headship in marriage. Solid numbers are hard to come by, but it appears that well over 90% of the church worldwide affirms the historic view of man and woman in church and marriage that the complementarian position reflects.

All this means that, in a sense, those who argue for egalitarian practice are advocating schism. They are calling for a break with the practice of almost all Christians in all times and places until the mid-20th century, and the continuing outlook and practice of over 90% of the church today.

The point here is not only ecumenical but also missional and evangelistic. In countries where Catholics or Orthodox are dominant, if minority churches ordain women, it is just one more justification for the majority to say, "See, these 'Christians' are really not even part of the historic tradition." In Muslim countries the criticism might be, "These people are just imposing Western culture on their own Scriptures—just like they want to do in our culture." Not ordaining women avoids a significant stumbling block to biblical witness.

For a long time Western Protestants centering in colleges, universities, some seminaries, and liberal denominations have been agitating for new hermeneutical outlooks that change church doctrine on male and female relationships. With the explosion of church growth in other parts of the world in recent decades, the

majority world church in the global South is now poised to push back on this issue. And it is doing so.

### **B. An Empirical Reason**

Second, there is an empirical reason not to abandon, even as we improve on, historic complementarian understanding. To ordain women is to risk the same precipitous fall in numbers and dilution in church purity that has been experienced in other Protestant subgroups that have taken this step.

The main example of the women's ordination experiment is to be found in mainline Western Protestantism. The drastic reduction in numbers of the traditional mainline churches in both northern Europe and North America is well documented. Their moves to ordain women can hardly be separated from their rush in many other areas to bring church views and practices into line with unfolding secular views and practices. Numeric decline may not necessarily follow women's ordination. But when one combines the mainline's aversion to historic Christian faith and practice, its frequent replacement of the historic with the ephemeral, and the outcome in terms of both raw numbers and (post-) Christian social presence today, the empirical data suggest that neither the mainline's theological moves nor its associated ecclesial shifts such as women's ordination are necessarily well advised.

Mary Anderson, senior pastor of Incarnation Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina, speaks to this. She reflected on the problem in a 2010 article called "The Fortieth Anniversary of Women's Ordination in the Lutheran Church."

Forty years ago women began to move slowly into the pulpits of Lutheran churches in America just as congregational members were starting to move out of the pews. I don't know that this phenomenon is strictly a coincidence. No doubt our feminist freedoms and our resistance to traditional institutions of all kinds had some unintentional collisions along the way. Through these decades both trends have increased so that in 2010, more ordained women, along with many of their male colleagues, are serving congregations that are surviving rather than thriving.<sup>2</sup>

### **C. A Hermeneutical Reason**

Third, there are hermeneutical reasons not to abandon, even as we improve on, historic complementarian understanding. To ordain women is typically to enshrine interpretive strategies that are harmful when applied to the Bible more broadly.

One of these strategies is to affirm the doctrine of cultural relativism to such an extreme extent that the Bible is declared non-authoritative in the domain of social

---

<sup>2</sup> *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 49/4 (Winter 2010) 354.

relations.<sup>3</sup> But there is little in Christian ethics, theology, and piety that does not relate rather directly to social relations. This move, therefore, robs the church of priceless guidance in these areas. It even directly discredits Holy Scripture by declaring sizable swaths of its teaching as sinful for us to affirm today.

A related move has been to say that the true teaching of Scripture may be found, not in Scripture, but in a trajectory perhaps beginning in the Scripture but terminating somewhere outside it, where the cultural limitations of biblical times and outlooks have been transcended.<sup>4</sup> This move likewise runs the risk of discrediting Scripture's counsel by encouraging us to forsake it for extra-biblical counsel validated by ever-changing cultural preferences. Such preferences are volatile and often detrimental to human welfare quite apart from running against God's Word.

Once the ground has been cleared of scriptural interference by a radical notion of cultural relativity, a second strategy is to affirm that the direction of modern mainstream Western culture in recent generations has been so beneficial to women that the church has no choice but to follow suit in whatever ways it can. This typically means affirming Western culture's root-and-branch critique of patriarchy and rejecting biblical norms for the definition of gender roles in marriage and in church leadership.

## Two Problems

There are two problems here. First, Western culture in many quarters has seen a pullback from some aspects of classic feminist doctrine. More Bible-friendly understandings of sexual identity have re-entered the secular marketplace of ideas as many have realized that misogyny is not necessarily the best way to counteract misogyny.<sup>5</sup>

The argument that the church needs to be egalitarian because that is the social wave of the future that helps us to interpret the Bible better is going to ring hollow with many in 2012 who might have jumped on the hermeneutical bandwagon in 1972 or 1992.

A second problem associated with this hermeneutical slide is that numerous social indicators in the West point to disastrous results for large numbers of women and children since the 1960s when social mores began an aggressive departure from biblical teaching in areas like sexuality, divorce, and abortion, and as women's ordination became more acceptable with the rise of feminism. Since that time, in the U.S. at least, rates of female poverty, female imprisonment and recidivism, child neglect or endangerment, sex crimes (particularly against children), internet

---

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Case for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1994): 4.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds., *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? The Equal Regard Marriage and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xv.

pornography, and sexually-transmitted diseases have increased dramatically. Many women in certain ways are better off than in the 1960s, but others, and perhaps many more, are not.<sup>6</sup>

Following cultural preference on gender matters when it conflicts with biblical teaching does not make a lot of sense when these preferences are wreaking such havoc in lives and society today. A sizable literature has arisen lamenting social changes since the 60s affecting family and marriage. These are the very changes that paved the way and have run interference for egalitarian views of marriage and ministry. Ours is hardly a social order that is so exemplary that we can declare it superior to what the Bible envisions.

#### **D. An Evangelistic Reason**

Fourth, there is an evangelistic reason not to abandon, even as we improve on, historic complementarian understanding. To ordain women is ultimately to alienate many if not most unchurched men (to say nothing of those who are churched and who cannot accept hermeneutical moves used to justify new views on marriage and ordination).

Why should we think that men who typically live in tension with their wives in marriage are going to subject themselves to the oversight of women ministers? To put the matter bluntly: in many marriages, wives try to control or at least change their husbands, and men refuse to be bossed. Unchurched men in particular are not apt to look favorably on ecclesial practice that puts women in the same position over the household of faith that they chafe against in their everyday home lives. They will simply avoid the church even more than is already and tragically the case. This may be a factor in the dramatic shrinkage of mainline denominations that has been underway for several decades.

There is another side to this evangelistic concern. Biblically informed women are just as apt to recoil from churches that ordain women as their likeminded brothers in the faith are, because their consciences and their sense of Holy Spirit guidance are offended. They feel it is disobedient to what the Scriptures teach. To put it positively, women living out the new life conveyed through the Bible's gospel will affirm church practice that robustly affirms the Bible's whole counsel. This includes particulars of women's and men's respective functions in the household of God. To capitulate to today's cultural pressure to ordain women endangers the gospel's evangelistic appeal to many women. They want husbands in their marriages and pastors in their churches to love and lead self-sacrificially as the Bible teaches. For them biblical teaching is ultimately discredited when this doctrine and ideal are abandoned.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Yarbrough, "Progressive and Historic: The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 2nd ed., Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 126–33.

## 2. Could the Bible Be Wrong on This Issue?

Yarbrough then turned to a second question: Why do we cling to complementarian teaching (along with our guns, some would fear) when Paul was so obviously a flawed man of his culture when it comes to this topic, and when the household codes he used to dictate to women are so obviously cultural artifacts with no bearing on today? And also what about slavery? If the Bible is wrong there, why can't it be wrong about its teaching on the sexes?

A short answer to these questions would be: we are convinced from Scripture that our position makes better sense of the biblical passages that guide the church in its faith and practice than other positions being offered today. But a longer answer is needed. Yarbrough first set forth a big-picture sketch of these matters in the interest of solidifying a biblical framework for pondering our conference theme.

### A. The Importance of the Bible

As Protestants, our convictions on this matter are important because we believe that the ministry of the Word is the lifeblood of the church. This is a priceless conviction of EFCA congregations in particular, whose roots lie in repudiation of a moribund, European state church nominalism like that decried by Kierkegaard and in later generations Adolf Schlatter and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The Genesis account assigns a leadership responsibility to the man and husband in the family (cf. Eph. 5:21-33 in conjunction with 1 Cor. 11:3, 7-8). The word "helper" in the Genesis 2:18 context (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13) carries the connotation of functional subordination. The Bible calls the husband in a Christian marriage the "head," a word which so far no Greek lexicon or major published English translation has rendered "source." The husband's leadership responsibility is not the result of the Fall, though since the Fall there is the danger that he will abuse his leadership prerogative, just as there is danger that the wife will abuse her mandate by rebelling against the creation order God established. The Christian husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. The Christian wife is to give her husband space to offer that leadership and respect it by responding positively to it.

Complementarian interpreters think this means that under Christ marriage is not a completely egalitarian affair. While there is vast flexibility and diversity within godly marriages, God's creation and redemption expectation is that the husband will take a leadership initiative within the marriage relationship in order for the two together to fulfill their domestic, ecclesial, and missional destiny in Christ. This is analogous to the leadership role that the Father took vis-à-vis the Son in Christ's earthly days: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). The Son and the Father in a complementary, not egalitarian, arrangement completed the work

of redemption. Christian husbands and wives in their mutual pact to glorify God in their relationship resemble the Trinity's own division of labor and perichoretic relations of persons.<sup>7</sup> Covenantal love is probably impossible where both parties insist on strict equivalency of rights and duties. Christ's glory lay in the fact that he did not regard equality with God the Father as a thing to be striven after (cf. Phil. 2:6), not that he demanded and received parity.

The beautiful and intimate male-female partnership in the marriage covenant is extended to the church in New Testament teaching. The church is God's household (1 Tim. 3:15), just as in Revelation it is the bride of the Lamb. The church is a family of redeemed families (of course single households are included), and it naturally reflects aspects of the Bible's divinely-willed family polity. God does not have one rule for private homes and a completely different one for his people as a corporate body assembled for worship and mobilized for mission. The early church was to a large extent a house church. The pastor or collective of elder leaders represented a fatherly presence there.

Just because churches outgrew personal homes does not mean that when that day arrived, they were released to abandon and remake apostolic church polity. Thus there is an analogy between the Christian husband's leadership responsibility in marriage, on the one hand, and Christian men's leadership responsibility at the church level. We need to recall here the "faithful husband" or "husband of one wife" qualification for overseer in 1 Timothy 3:2, and how he should be a proven manager of his household in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, and then note how that links with the oversight responsibility of the pastor in 1 Timothy 2:12 and many other New Testament passages, like Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" (ESV).

It need hardly be stated that this in no way marginalizes women, as Galatians 3:28 makes clear: in Christ, as far as the promise of the gospel is concerned, there is "neither male nor female."<sup>8</sup> Numerous New Testament references to women co-workers in the gospel underscore this. Christian women and men alike are joint heirs of grace (1 Pet. 3:7). Yet equality in worth and dignity did not translate into strict equivalency of function and role in the apostolic church. There is no compelling reason from Scripture for this understanding to be jettisoned as it has been in recent generations.

## B. The Culture Question

As noted above, some charge that biblical teaching on this point was culturally captive and therefore should now be abandoned. One problem with this is that the charge is logically incoherent. If Paul's teaching on the sexes is culturally *determined* (all will agree it is culturally *conditioned*), we are bound to ask where in his

---

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, proposed limits to this analogy: Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, "Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussion," *Trinity Journal* 29 NS (February 2008): 267–283.

<sup>8</sup> Underscored in Barrs, *Through His Eyes*, 250, 279, 310–311, 316, 333n6.

culture the notion came from that husbands ought to love their wives like Christ loved the church and died for it. Such selfless sacrifice for one's wife is neither a pagan idea nor a doctrine that many Jews seemed to have drawn from the Old Testament, though they might have at least in nascent form. It must have come in large measure by revelation. Paul's teaching on male and female is not primarily cultural but revelational, at least if we think that all Scripture is inspired by God. Paul's teaching is rooted in the cross. As Jesus died for the sake of others, a husband must die to self, and perhaps die literally, for the sake of his most significant other, his wife. This is not a cultural but a christological conviction rooted in Jesus' historical example as the fulfillment of his unique incarnation. Nothing could be much *less* cultural! This is all from heaven, not from man!

Therefore, the husband who affirms his wife's claim to his life's loyalty is in no position to tell God he is not responsible for the leadership prerogatives that the same Scriptures enjoin on him. A wife who enjoys her godly husband's dying commitment in marital and Christian love in obedience to Scripture cannot reasonably declare that she is free from any form of submission to her husband on the basis of Scripture, which clearly calls her to this.

At other points, too, the Bible reflects something more nuanced than mere cultural compliance. Other ancient religions in both Old and New Testament settings were replete with female priestesses and deities. Where did the Judeo-Christian pattern of male worship leadership, without attenuation of women's redemptive privilege, come from? Why is the God of Scripture one and one only, more paternal than maternal, and certainly not androgynous? As Paul affirmed at Athens (Acts 17:23), the God of the gospel is not a cultural composite but a unique reality in Paul's (and every) cultural milieu. It is no wonder that in many respects the counsel of God's inspired Word conveys transcendent and not merely immanent verities.

### **C. What about Paul?**

Why should we respect Paul's teaching on this matter as God's word rather than egalitarians who want to discount what he says, at least for application, in our time? Let us not discount the Bible's witness to this apostle of Christ—he met Christ on the Damascus Road, he defied death for 30 years preaching Christ up to what was probably a martyr's death, he performed a host of miracles, he suffered for Christ immeasurably (2 Cor. 11:23-33) and was caught up to the third heaven, God's very presence, and heard things that cannot be told, which men may not utter. In sum, Paul was uniquely gifted to convey Christ in his fullness to the whole world. How could he have been culpably time-bound about man and woman? And if he is time-bound, it cuts both ways. *Whatever* he teaches and practices, including Galatians 3:28, is limited in insight and to that setting. He could have been wrong, and his insights were definitely only for then and there. In sum, our question must be: if Paul was culturally bound in something so mundane as family and church order, why should

we believe him about eternal mysteries, about the things of God? The answer for many, of course, is "we don't." But in the EFCA, we do.

#### **D. What About Slavery?**

Many “progressive” interpreters argue that in their teaching about slavery the biblical writers were culpably implicated in the sins of their eras; the Bible advocates what we can today only condemn—just as it denies the pastoral office to women, which we likewise cannot accept. But this is to overlook ways in which biblical figures challenged that institution. Slavery in Israel was usually of a limited, six-year duration (the exception: Deut. 15:12-18; Lev. 25:39-43). As M. A. Dandamayev notes, “We have in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake and not just in the interest of their masters.”<sup>9</sup>

In New Testament times Paul advises slaves to gain their freedom if they can lawfully do so (1 Cor. 7:21). Far from mandating slavery in biblical times and “permitting the ownership of slaves today,”<sup>10</sup> New Testament teaching was the foundation for the abolishing of the institution of slavery in the Roman world. F. F. Bruce notes that the little epistle to Philemon alone “brings us into an atmosphere in which the institution could only wilt and die.”<sup>11</sup> “The early Christian ideology undermined the institution of slavery, declaring an equality of all people in Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

In modern times, while it is true that some justified slavery by the Bible, it is also true that slavery was abolished in Britain and in the US and curtailed internationally in the 19th century because other people opposed it based on better readings of the Bible. In sum, it is hardly compelling logically to argue that women may now be pastors because of how benighted biblical teaching on slavery is.

#### **E. What About the So-Called Household Codes (*Haustafeln*)?**

A number of New Testament passages (1 Pet. 2:18 [or 13]-3:7, Eph. 5:22-6:9, and Col. 3:18-4:1) contain instructions regarding household relationships. Many scholars have concluded that these are “rules . . . based on a hierarchical and patriarchal structure cemented by the principle of obedience. As such, they represent a concession on the part of the early Church to the social ethic of the first century.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, these passages do not consist of divine counsel for God’s people; they enshrine human convictions that we are now free to reject as unacceptable for contemporary Christians. Although the *Haustafeln* pertain to marriage and not church order per se, they are germane to the women’s ordination question, because if the New Testament can be shown to be culturally captive in its male-female notions

---

<sup>9</sup> M. A. Dandamayev, “Slavery (OT),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:65.

<sup>10</sup> Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 401.

<sup>12</sup> Dandamayev, “Slavery, (OT),” 6:65.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 91

regarding marriage, it is but a short step to conclude that apostolic precedent and doctrine are no longer binding for the ordination question, either. Yet a few key points bear noting:

- *Neuer Wettstein* II/I lists eight classical parallels said to reflect the “philosophical doctrines of obligation as they stand behind the ‘*Haustafeln*.’”<sup>14</sup> But extra-biblical *Haustafeln* passages are quite different from the New Testament passages in form and substance. For example, none of the extra-biblical parallels contains vocative verbs of address to subjects—Aristotle does not deign to speak directly to men, much less to women, children, and slaves like Paul and Peter do. As M. Eugene Boring has recently admitted, “There are . . . no close formal parallels [in ancient literature] to the *Haustafeln* that first made their appearance in Christian circles in Colossians 3:18–4:1.”<sup>15</sup> Far from the typical assumption that New Testament writers adopted an established literary form, it turns out they pioneered it. Novel likewise is the christological substructure and theological anthropology found in the New Testament passages.

- The presumed functions of the *Haustafeln* require careful sifting. Is it really true that their presence in 1 Peter, Ephesians, and Colossians is the tip of an iceberg that reveals the early church to have been so concerned to “reassure the Greco-Roman world that the church was not subversive of good order as defined by the culture”?<sup>16</sup> Do we have any evidence that that “world” read New Testament epistles in the first place? And wasn’t it scandalized by New Testament belief and behavior anyhow? The New Testament stress is on fulfilling God’s will, not on assuaging public opinion.

- To receive contemporary wisdom on the *Haustafeln* uncritically is to render New Testament paraenesis on family, sexuality, and even participation in the economy as counsel essentially unsuited for application today. Boring concludes: “The New Testament codes are always presented in the context of letters addressed to a particular situation, do not purport to give valid rules for every time and place, and must be reinterpreted anew in every situation.”<sup>17</sup> Or again: “Commands to be subordinate . . . do not establish any particular social order as given by God.”<sup>18</sup> In this view, the church is largely on its own interpersonally, taking its cue from the surrounding culture since God has left it without direction in marriage, home, and employment relations (or in relating to slaves, still relevant since close to 30 million

---

<sup>14</sup> Georg Strecker and Udo Schnelle with Gerald Seelig, eds., *Neuer Wettstein: Texte um Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*, vol. 2, part 1: *Texte zur Briefliteratur und zur Johannesapokalypse* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1996), 752 (cf. 752–757). The passages: Philo Decal 165–167; Aristot Pol I 3, 1253b1–14, 1254a22–23, 1254b9–16; Epictetus Ench 30; Diss II 17, 30–33; 14,7–8; Stob IV 27,2.

<sup>15</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “Household Codes,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 2:905.

<sup>16</sup> This function for the *Haustafeln* is suggested by Peter Davids in commenting on 1 Peter in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 4, *Hebrews to Revelation*, Clinton Arnold, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 133.

<sup>17</sup> Boring, “Household Codes,” 2:906.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

people are reckoned to live in slavery at this moment<sup>19</sup>), and ecclesial order at critical points.

It seems we are justified in shying away from the reductionism involved in much current application of the New Testament *Haustafeln* form. *Haustafeln*-informed arguments that the New Testament at least permits and may even mandate abandonment of apostolic church precedent with respect to husband-wife relations and women's ordination remain unpersuasive.

## Conclusion

Dr. Yarbrough's previous lecture closed with a question: Is our church order an apt vehicle for administering God's grace in the church by the gospel of our crucified, risen, ascended, reigning, and returning Lord? For most of us, the make or break reply to that is: Is our church order plausibly in line with Scripture? In this lecture Dr. Yarbrough attempted to offer some hermeneutical grounds consistent with Scripture for answering "yes" to that question.

---

## Leadership in the Local Church and a Theology of Pastoral Care

Robert W. Yarbrough

In his final lecture Dr. Yarbrough moved to the practical area of pastoral care in the local church, particularly as it relates to women. He focused especially on the practice of leading women and on encouraging leadership in women. He began by setting out a theology of pastoral care, with an overview of purpose, outlook, and duties.

### A Framework of Pastoral Care

All pastoral care should flow from a coherent sense of purpose. James Plueddemann in his book *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church*<sup>20</sup> suggests that the ultimate purpose of leadership in the church is "to bring people into full relationship with" the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Then people can fulfill their highest purpose: to know God, glorify God, love God, and fear God.<sup>22</sup> We do this best in ecclesial mode, that is, through the church. That is where pastors and other

---

<sup>19</sup> This can be corroborated by numerous credible Web sites.

<sup>20</sup> Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

leaders come in, as group activities of any kind only happen well over time with leadership.

Given this underlying purpose, pastoral convictions are vital. What a pastor thinks will steer how and where he leads. Yarbrough then set forth insights from various writers on leadership in the local church. Supremely, godly pastoral leadership involves a constant proclamation of the truth of the gospel lived out in relationships of love. A complementarian ministry that glorifies God must be a deeply relational ministry.

Why did Jesus attract and retain the loyalty of women? Why did Paul, with teaching and church order so distasteful to many today, plant churches that were strong enough to become the basis for Western Christianity? F. F. Bruce has observed that one of Paul's great strengths was he had a genius for friendship. Many of these friends and co-workers were women, even though Pauline church order did not view women as possible congregational overseers any more than it viewed women as possible father-figures in a marriage. Yet Paul worked comfortably and closely with women, and vice versa. And so should it be with us today. Male complementarian leadership needs a constant reminder of the possibility and priority of co-ministry with women in their congregations. To affirm and promote that Yarbrough offered six principles.

### **1. Care About What They Care About**

People must know that we as pastors care about the things that matter to them. As an example of this, we see in the Gospels that parents brought children to Jesus. They wouldn't have done this if had come across as aloof from or indifferent to kids. He took them in his arms. When a spiritual leader loves kids, parents and especially moms are going to give that guy a gold star. And gold stars can translate quickly into the mutual respect and understanding that must obtain for leadership to be effective.

### **2. Maintain Godly Relationships with Women**

Paul urges us to "treat older men like fathers, younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, and younger women like sisters, in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Do you ever commend your mother in your preaching? Or what about your grandmother, or an aunt? How about your wife? This sends a message that you love and respect and connect with women. Do you ever commend women in the church, whatever their age, when their selfless or exemplary lives before the Lord justify it? They will hear that. It will open channels of relationship between them and you their pastor.

Moreover, we must maintain purity in our thoughts about women. Erotic allure is all around us and can infect our souls. Women will sense this in a pastoral leader. The bad ones may try to connect with their pastor at that level. The good ones will be repelled. Either scenario is fatal to the good faith needed between pastoral leaders and women in their charge.

In this regard, it helps immensely when pastors have a solid and joyful relationship with their wives. As pastors we can have solid and energizing relations with women when they are part of friendship and hospitality and ministry networks that include our wives.

### **3. Maintain a Modest Sense of Humor**

Studies over the years suggest that a sense of humor ranks very high on what women find attractive in a man. Of course, we are pastoring women and not courting them. But women will appreciate a pastor who can put others at ease with humor and bring levity into situations where it fits. Part of this involves humility: sometimes a person is humorless because they are so self-important. To be able to see the light side of things means you have de-centered yourself, especially when humor comes at our own expense.

### **4. Train Women for Ministry**

To lead women means taking their giftedness and sense of calling seriously and helping train them to achieve their God-given goals. Ministry training and leadership training should not be just for men. Yes, there are male-specific ministry and training activities. But many women express frustration about the low ceiling of biblical and theological education available to them in their churches. Isn't that why ministries like Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) have flourished? Women want and need more. Do women sense respect on our part, pastors, for the talents and gifts that they often exhibit? Do we help them find outlets for their zeal that will help them grow? Are we willing to work with them to open up venues for their skills—like jail ministry or hospital work or home Bible studies or visiting shut-ins or offering robust classes or electives in our CE programs? And then do we value their contribution enough to find ways to train them for these duties?

Do we suggest books to them? Do we talk theology with them when there is interest, as is often the case? Do we listen to them and absorb what they are saying? Do we pray for them? Are we encouraging a Titus 2 setting, in which older women are being equipped to instruct the younger? We face challenges in helping women take wing in the spiritual service and intellectual growth that many crave to devote themselves to.

### **5. Don't Forget the Children**

Many women in a church will have kids, and a primary way to a woman's heart is through her children. Do we love kids, do we have good relations with our own, do we reach out to kids proactively in ways that make moms eager to support the church because of how much their kids gain from it?

## 6. Inspiring Loyalty and Trust

Little good can go forth in the church if pastors do not inspire the loyalty and trust of women. Pastoral leaders must demonstrate their commitment to the spiritual well-being of women and give thought to their distinctive callings and characteristics, learning styles, worries, skills, aptitudes, burdens and dangers. And they need to listen to women and to learn from them, just like in a good marriage they do from their wives. A complementarian ministry philosophy should never just mean for women: know your place, take what you can get, and gut it out. They should feel respected and cared for because by God they are. How could ministers of God called for their sake do otherwise?

### A Closing Word

Dr. Yarbrough recalled a time he was called upon to preach at a TEDS chapel on 1 Peter 3:1-7, which begins with these words: "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands." In preparation, he sought the input of the wife of a pastor with whom he had worked. Her words were extremely helpful, especially her encouragement to preach with conviction that this is God's Word to us and as such it is for our good – for men and women. This experience underlined in his mind that in the complementarian local church setting, *only* men working together with women like 1 Peter 3 says – with understanding, and showing honor, and with prayers – can glorify God.

Yarbrough closed with the familiar words of Scripture: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions" (2 Tim. 4:2-3).

As we teach and exercise oversight like 1 Timothy 2:12 says, may God grace our churches and us pastors with the humility to tend the flock and promote the Lord in the ways Scripture clearly describes.

---

# **Creation and Re-Creation: Male and Female in the Image of God, the Fall and Redemption**

**Donald A. Carson**

Dr. Donald Carson presented a second set of lectures at the conference, considering the complementarian position in relation to the doctrine of creation and fall, in relation to marriage and family and in relation to ministry in the local church.<sup>23</sup>

## **I. Creation: Genesis 1-2**

Dr. Carson began with a recognition that the issues raised by the first two chapters of Genesis are massive; they are debated in voluminous literature; and almost all exegetical points are contested. Yet these chapters must be dealt with, for they are important intrinsically to the entire biblical story line. In addition, they are quoted in significant ways in the New Testament (cf. e.g., Eph. 5:31; 1 Cor. 11; 1 Tim. 2:13,14), and they lay the foundation for themes that run throughout the canon.

He contended that though there are two creation accounts (Genesis 1 and Genesis 2), and both affirm the distinctiveness of human beings in creation, the differences between them cannot be played off against one another, since both accounts are given by God. We must understand them in the light of their common divine authorship.

With that said, the differences between the two accounts are significant. In comparing their respective presentations of God, chapter 1 emphasizes divine sovereignty. He is the sole creator who brings order out of chaos and formlessness, and who then entrusts his creation to human beings. In contrast, chapter 2 emphasizes God's personal nature. The most striking initial difference is that Genesis 2 presents God as the LORD—Yahweh, the name that came to be associated with God's covenant with Israel. In addition, we see his immanent presence in relationship with his image bearers—sending rain, shaping the man from the dust, breathing life into his nostrils, planting the garden and putting the man there before creating the woman from his flesh.

In both chapters God is distinct from his creation, but chapter 1 presents a broader "Google earth" perspective, while chapter 2 is more of a "street view," with names, locations and rivers, and a sense of abundance and delight in God's creative work.

---

<sup>23</sup> This report was prepared from Dr. Carson's oral presentations, while a written text was used for the report of Dr. Yarbrough's lectures. Consequently, the report of Dr. Carson's lectures contains few footnotes.

With respect to human beings, both accounts portray humanity as the pinnacle of creation. Genesis 1, however, emphasizes the human beings' similarity to God, made in his image, mandated to rule, while chapter 2 presents a clearer similarity of human beings to animals, made from the dust. In addition, while Genesis 1 declares human beings to have been created male and female, the differences between them become much more evident in Genesis 2.

### **Exegetical Reflections Genesis 1**

Dr. Carson then turned from introductory remarks to some exegetical reflections on the biblical creation accounts. In the crucial passage, Genesis 1:26-28, however one translates *adam* (as "man" or "mankind"), it is clear by verse 28 that both the man and the woman, male and female, are blessed by God and are commanded to be fruitful, to fill the earth and to subdue it, ruling over the creatures God had made.

In discussing the expression "Let *us* make . . ." (1:26), Carson presented the various views: Is God addressing the heavenly council? Is this a royal "we"? Or is this a reference to the three persons of the holy trinity? The last of these has been the most common understanding in the church, but in his view, it is at best no more than an adumbration, faintly hinting at a reality yet to be revealed. A similar hint may be found in chapter 3 when God clothes Adam and Eve in the skins of animals. In that context this doesn't teach the need for atoning sacrifice to deal with sin, but when reading the whole of Scripture canonically, it points us in that direction.

### **Male and Female**

In Genesis 1:27, the three statements provide a step-parallelism in which each line adds something to the picture. The first emphasizes God as creator, the second focuses on creation in the image of God, while the third introduces the differentiation of mankind into male and female. Though obviously animal creation is similarly structured sexually, in a wild and colorful way, none of that is mentioned in the text. Only of humans, created in God's image, is this sexual difference noted. In Carson's view, this is significant, suggesting that that is what it means to be human created in the image of God. This is who we are—necessarily gendered creatures.

Certainly this gendered creation in God's image does not mean that God himself is male and female, for God is spirit. But it does raise the question of whether there is any sort of correspondence between the plurality of humanness and the plurality intrinsic in God's oneness. Though we must be careful in such theological speculation and one must not suggest that a single person is not fully made in God's image, Carson contended there may be some trinitarian echo here. There is a social wholeness in this sexually differentiated creation that is important and should be listened to carefully. The language suggests that in the beginning there was perfect

harmony between these mutually complementary human beings—as perfect as the harmony in God.

### **The Image of God**

Dr. Carson acknowledged that the nature of the *imago dei* is hotly contested, for nowhere in Scripture is it defined. As with other biblical expressions like "kingdom of God" and "Son of God," one must seek to understand the expression by understanding how it functions in a particular context. An image includes the idea that it reflects something, and in the context of Genesis 1, human beings are to reflect God in some way. In this passage, God speaks and human beings speak back. This points to the personal relationship with God that develops in the passage that is unique to human beings. Perhaps more significant, reflection of God in this context is found in the command to "rule." This God-like function is given to both men and women (v. 28).

Both men and women are in God's image, but Carson contended that we must still see some differences here. God made two complementary persons. Our gender is inseparable from who we are. The expression of creation in Genesis 1:26-28 suggests that we maximally reflect God as gendered creatures.

To flesh out the way in which human beings reflect God, Carson used the analogy of "son" language in the Bible. We often think of the relationship of a son to his father in purely biological terms. But for the ancients, the association in this relationship was much more functional. Because most sons took on the vocation of their fathers, and were trained by them, sons reflected their fathers in all sorts of ways. In a similar way, in bearing the image of God we are to reflect God—we are to be like God insofar as human beings can be (recognizing the helpful distinction between the communicable and non-communicable divine attributes).

### **Genesis 2**

Dr. Carson's exegetical reflections on Genesis 2 can be summarized in seven points:

1. The passage gives prominence to a certain temporal priority: the male is created first. Then the Lord places him in the garden (vv. 8,15). It is a temporal priority to which some New Testament texts draw attention (1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:13).

2. Both the command to work and care for the garden (2:15) and the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17) are given to Adam directly before the woman arrives on the scene.

3. For the first time, the Lord declares something not good: the man being alone. This leads to the creation of the woman.

4. The naming of the animals suggests two conclusions: the human being is different from the animals and that he rules over them. Naming is an act of authority.

5. The creation of the woman is neither from the animals, nor a fresh creation *de novo*. Instead, it is from man; consequently, she is called "woman," which establishes her as part of him, from him, yet together they make a complementary whole. The first human words recorded in the Bible are words of delight: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man" (2:23), expressing a grateful recognition for the sameness and the difference, forming a union that comes to be called marriage.

6. The woman was created to be a "helper" suitable for the man. This word need not be understood in a demeaning way (e.g., "Mommy's little helper"), for God himself can be called our "helper" (e.g., Pss. 27:9; 118:7). The flow of the narrative, however, creates a certain kind of relationship. She is not called into existence to help the animals, but the man. And the man is not created to help her, since she did not yet exist. This point, which Paul picks up explicitly (1 Cor. 11:9), does not express any ontological inferiority, but it unavoidably presupposes a distinction in roles.

7. The marriage that is formed is not the joining of two identical persons, but almost the reunion of two slightly different halves. They come together to form one flesh—one in their sexual union; one in the children they produce; one in the establishment of one new social unit—the first family.

## II. The Fall Genesis 3

Dr. Carson recognized that the biblical account of the Fall leaves us with many unanswered questions, including how the serpent came to be as he was. In any event, he is clearly portrayed as a creature, created by God and not equal to God. And because God originally made all things good, it is entirely natural to presuppose some sort of fallenness or rebellion on the serpent's part. Whether the serpent is the representative of Satan or his embodiment is not stated, though later in Scripture the serpent is explicitly identified as Satan (cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:2).

The serpent's temptation doesn't begin with a denial, but with an evocative question: "Did God really say . . . ?"—a question that has a built-in exaggeration designed to portray God as a cosmic killjoy, despite the initial impression of joy and delight in God's work so far. The woman's response begins well, but then you sense a bit of resentment creeping in—"and you must not touch it" (3:3). Then you find the first massive denial of a biblical truth—the first doctrine to be denied in Scripture is judgment (once that is denied, anything is allowed!). And this, Carson contended, has been a repeated pattern in the history of the church: "Soften hell and you open up a lot of things."

The serpent's final move is an assault on God's goodness: "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). This knowledge has the overtones of establishing good and evil, a prerogative rightly belonging to God alone. But it may also have something of the emphasis of knowing it personally. God in his omniscience knows

all things, but there is a sense in which we may know evil by participating in it. An oncologist may know cancer better than a patient does from the outside, but a patient knows it better from the inside. So it may be with knowing good and evil here, for by the end of the chapter, God himself acknowledges that the man has come to know good and evil. Evil has its evil effect: "the eyes of the man and the woman are opened and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (3:7).

At this point, Dr. Carson talked about nudist colonies. In the best of them (by that, referring to those that had a theory behind them), it was believed that to create a perfect world of perfect relationships we simply need perfect candor and openness, with nudity seen as its physical expression. But, Carson contended, it never works because of our sin. We are full of jealousies and resentments that do not go away when you take off our clothes! You can afford to be naked only if you have absolutely nothing to hide—nothing, in word, thought or deed, about which you are ashamed. Sadly, that is true of none of us.

### **Adam's Chief Culpability**

But a crucial question arises: Why, if the woman is seduced first, is Adam given so much of the blame (cf. Gen. 3:22-24)—especially by Paul (cf. Rom. 5:12-19)? Though theories abound, Dr. Carson considers the text to be clear. The narrative presents a complete reversal of God's created order—"It's no longer man submitting himself to God, and the woman submitting herself to man by helping him, together having authority over the creatures. All is reversed. The woman listens to the creature, the man listens to the woman, and neither listens to God."

A number of features in the text point to this conclusion, particularly the Lord's preface to his curse of Adam: "Because you listened to your wife . . ." (3:17). This is a literary reversal overthrowing the entire created order of Genesis 2. Further, the text ties the sentence of death expressly to the man ("to dust you will return" [3:19]). Surely this will apply also to the woman, but it is linked literarily to 2:17 where the prohibition of the curse and its promise are tied to Adam before the woman is even there. The sequencing of events in chapter 2 establishes Adam as the head or representative of the race.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> In response to a question, Dr. Carson referred to the position argued by Susan Foh ("What Is the Woman's Desire?" *WTJ* 37 [1975]: 376-383) as the most likely understanding of the curse of the woman: "Your desire shall be for your husband and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). The only other pairing of these two verbs occurs in Genesis 4:6. In the light of that passage, the curse is best understood as a woman's desire to control her husband, to which he will fight back, resulting in the destruction of human marriage.

### III. Redemption

The *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 initiates the massive biblical plan of redemption that finally comes to a climax in the cross and resurrection, leading to its consummation in the new heaven and the new earth. Carson noted that in that final state we are presented with a vision of goodness and glory that goes beyond what we find in Eden, for in that place there will be "neither marriage nor giving in marriage" (Mt. 22:30).

#### Considering 1 Corinthians 11

Dr. Carson then moved to Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 11:2-16, which pick up on several of the themes of the Genesis account. Interestingly, this passage has a number of similarities with 1 Timothy 2. Both are by Paul, both are concerned with the conduct of men and women, both are concerned at some level or other with hair, childbirth and what women wear, and both talk about participation in some way in the church determined in some way by gender, and both refer back to creation and the fall. Dr. Carson first considered the broad context of the passage before looking at two key exegetical turning points.

In considering this passage it is important to recognize that much of 1 Corinthians has to do with not standing on your rights. In chapter 6 Paul contends that it is better to suffer wrong than to defame the gospel by taking another believer to court. In chapter 8 Paul urges the believers not to stand on their right to eat food offered to idols. In chapter 9 the apostle claims his right to get married, but he resolves not to exercise that right. Further, he contends that he has a right to monetary support for his gospel labor, but among the Corinthians he did not use that right. Carson suggested that you can't help but get the feeling as you read through this passage that Paul is concerned about people standing on their rights so much that they are threatening the stability of the dynamic relationship between men and women.

#### The Meaning of "Head"

The first major exegetical issue concerns the meaning of the word "head" (*kephale*). Dr. Carson reviewed the arguments for the two dominant theories: that it means "source" (as in the "head" of a river) or "authority over." He concluded that almost everyone in the field today recognizes that when *kephale* is used in the singular metaphorically to mean something other than a literal part of the body it has the overtone of authority. He asserted, "to my knowledge, there is no exception."

One must observe the pun that Paul uses in this passage—using both the literal and metaphorical meanings of the word when talking about "dishonoring one's head." But what does it mean when Paul says "the head of Christ is God"? Here Carson spent some time discussing the raging debate whether this phrase refers to

"an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father." That is, is Jesus' subordination to the Father just a part of his earthly, incarnational relationship (i.e., a part of the economic trinity) or does this reflect a reality of the eternal Godhead (i.e., part of the immanent or ontological trinity)? The whole history of the church has emphasized the equality of the persons of the Godhead – that they are equally God, but does that then exclude a functional subordination?

Some have sought to deny any functional subordination, even within the economic trinity, by insisting on such concepts as "mutual deference" and "mutual submission" of the Father and the Son, but Carson argued that they have not listened to the text carefully enough. John in his Gospel speaks of the obedience of the Son to the Father, never of the obedience of the Father to the Son. A father may defer to a son's requests, but he does not obey them. An expression such as "mutual deference" confuses that difference and does not appreciate how father/son language in the Bible functions.

In Carson's view, though many might not like the word "hierarchy," and it might have negative overtones that one might want to avoid, it makes perfect sense as a description of what Paul speaks of in this passage: "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). He stressed that this does not mean that the woman is inferior to her husband any more than it means that the Son is inferior to his Father. And it is certainly not suggesting that the Son is in any sense less God than his Father, and therefore that the woman is less a human being than her husband. All such notions are missing the point.

### **The Significance of Head Coverings**

The second exegetical turning point concerns the significance of head coverings in this context in Corinth. Why should it be the case that "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head" (11:4-5)?

Carson made the observation that women here are praying and prophesying. So whatever Paul means in urging women to "keep silent in the church" (1 Cor. 14:33-35), this has to be taken into account.

Dr. Carson acknowledged that the precise nature of the "head coverings" or the "authority on (or over) the head" is far from certain and suggestions as to what is meant here abound. One strong possibility is that in Corinth a woman was expected to have her hair covered as a sign of being married. Not to do so would be seen as "dishonoring to her head" – that is, her husband. In any event, the precise nature of the "covering" is not as important as its symbolic significance.<sup>25</sup> Paul is at pains here to preserve the difference between what is appropriate behavior in the form of dress

---

<sup>25</sup> One might make a similar argument with regard to Paul's admonition to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26).

for men and women, and the way that that may reflect a wife's submission to her husband. Exactly what form that may take in any particular culture may vary, but the principle remains.

Significantly, the apostle grounds this distinction in ways that transcend the specific cultural situation in Corinth. Carson listed six reasons for Paul's instructions:

1. The very structure of the Godhead (v. 3).
2. The original order of creation (vv. 7-9).
3. The superintending of the angels (v. 10). This is difficult to determine, but angels were sometimes seen as a symbol of God's ordering of society.
4. The natural order (v. 14). Human beings intuitively know that men and women are not identical and have a God-given, innate sense of what is appropriate for each.
5. The traditional teaching in the church (v. 2).
6. The universal practice of the church (v. 16).

Paul insists in this passage that the creation order does not lapse in the new creation found in Christ in the life of the church. We have been given enduring principles. However, we are now left with the challenge of knowing how those principles apply in the cultural settings in which we find ourselves. We must still determine what symbols might be equivalent to head coverings in our world today.

## **The Family: Husbands and Wives, Love and Submission, Christ and the Church**

**Donald A. Carson**

In his second lecture, Dr. Carson turned his attention to the subject of men and women as reflected in the family. He focused on two central texts: Eph. 5:15-31 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

### **Ephesians 5:15-32**

In discussing this passage, Carson made a point of showing that the Greek structure actually begins in verse 15, although most English Bibles begin a new section at verse 21. The command to be filled with the Spirit (v. 18) is fleshed out by a string of participles ("speaking to one another," "singing and making music," "giving thanks" and "submitting to one another"), all in one long sentence. This is what spiritual existence looks like. This is then worked out in the following verses: in the relationships of wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters (5:22-6:9). Significantly, what is said governing those relationships, and the

submission which is called for in each of them, is as mandated as giving thanks, which is immensely important in biblical teaching (cf. e.g., Rom. 1:21).

Carson noted also that in each case in the three pairs immediately after the command to submit in verse 21 (wives/husbands, children/parents, slaves/masters) the perceived weaker of each pair comes first. In addition, in each case the stronger party is not then told to exercise authority in the relationship. Paul does not instruct slaves to submit and masters to exercise clout, nor does he urge children to obey and parents to command. Instead a challenge is given to both parties. The same is true with wives and husbands.

All this is recognized by Gordon Fee in an article on this passage. Fee has argued that cultural norms in Paul's day were so authority-driven that this way of balancing things out was a spectacularly healthy amelioration. Fee contends, however, that it would have been beyond the bounds of Paul's thinking that one could have had, as he says we have today, genuine egalitarian marriages steeped in love. Hence, Paul was right so far as he went, but had he lived in our day, he would have gone much further. With due respect, Carson considered Fee's view totally wrong. Although you can talk about cultural trends, there was as much diversity in marriage in the first century as there is today. In addition, we know that Paul—and before him, Jesus—could be spectacularly anti-cultural when he wanted to be. Carson urged great caution regarding arguments that depend too strongly on what the New Testament writers could or could not have imagined.

### **"Submit to one another" (v. 21)**

Paul's command to "submit to one another" (v. 21) has received a great deal of attention, and Dr. Carson sought to address the view that it undermined any hierarchical understanding of the husband/wife relationship. The verb "to submit" (*hupatassein*) in the New Testament, Carson argued, invariably suggests submission in some ordered array, as, e.g., in a military hierarchy or a master/servant relationship, and it only makes sense in that context. It is simply not used in a context in which everybody is in some way submitting to everybody.

Second, the meaning of the word *allêlois* ("to one another") need not always be reciprocal, that is, requiring that everyone is submitting to everyone else. Whether or not the meaning is reciprocal depends on the context. For example, in the Book of Revelation we read of massacres in which the combatants "killed one another" (Rev. 6:4). It is inconceivable that this should be understood in a strictly reciprocal manner.

Further, in the passage we find three pairs: wives/husbands, children/parents and slaves/masters, and the latter two certainly do not allow for mutual submission—parents do not submit to children and masters do not submit to slaves. It appears likely that Paul is saying that being filled with the Spirit means that kind of mutual submission that works out in these ordered arrays.

It is significant, Carson noted, that in each of the so-called "household codes" in the New Testament (including the non-Pauline 1 Pet. 3:1) the directive is always

for wives to submit to their husbands and not vice-versa. To contend that our understanding of each of these directives must be governed by some strict reciprocity allegedly affirmed in Ephesians 5:21 is faulty exegesis. We ought to listen to what Paul says to us in these "household codes" – it is for our good!

### **The Nature of Submission**

In considering the nature of the submission Paul prescribes in the husband/wife relationship, Carson focused on the central comparison given by Paul to the relationship of Christ to his church. The notion of Christ as the head of the church occurs often, sometimes with the specific word "head" and sometimes without. In Ephesians alone we see it at 1:22 and 4:15. But how does the church submit to Christ? Not in reluctant misery, as a losing wrestler "submits" to a victorious opponent. Rather, if you listen to the whole voice of Scripture on this point, the submission of the church to Christ is joyful, wholehearted, grateful, willing and voluntary. It is a grace-empowered submission, but it is, nonetheless, a total submission, without grudging.

This attitude is expressed throughout Ephesians in expressions like "find out what pleases the Lord" (5:10) and "understand what the Lord's will is" (5:17). Submitting to the Lord means discerning the Lord's will and doing it, precisely because you want to do it.

On the other side of this analogy, Christ loves the church, and "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" is Paul's prayer for believers (Eph. 3:18-19). Christ's love comes to those totally unworthy of it, to make the unlovely lovely—to make his church holy, cleansing her by the washing of water by the word. This is the truth that grounds the admonition that comes in chapter 5.

### **"Wives, submit to your husbands . . . "**

Carson noted that wives are mentioned first, with a shorter exhortation. Significantly, the wife is addressed directly, as a responsible moral agent. She is called to submit to her husband for the sole reason that he is her head, as Christ is the church's head.

We ought not to misunderstand Paul's instruction that "wives are supposed to submit to their husbands in everything." This does not mean that every decision a husband makes is always good and holy and just. The point is simply that there is no "no go" area, just as the church is to submit to Christ in every area. Carson suggested that we find this difficult not because the text is so difficult, but because we don't like it.

But as we consider this word, we must acknowledge that this is an argument by analogy. Whenever you have an analogy, you don't have an identity. The parallel between Christ and husband is certainly not complete. After all, Christ is perfect;

husbands are not. If you immediately begin to understand this text by going to hard cases you will end up discounting it altogether, for just as in law, hard cases make bad theology.

Carson was adamant that this text does not justify spousal abuse. If a husband beats his wife, she should call the police! The Bible is not eager to justify injustice. But this passage shows how marriage is supposed to work, what is mandated for Christian marriages when you are filled with the Spirit.

### **"Husbands, love your wives . . . "**

In what Dr. Carson, speaking as a husband, called "a pretty miserably high standard," Paul calls husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Christ loved the church with utmost self-sacrifice for our good, and so should husbands love their wives. A husband ought to voluntarily, cheerfully and happily sacrifice himself for his wife's good. Certainly the text does not give us rules to go by, but the principle needs to be fleshed out in real life, in whatever cultural setting.

Carson observed that in his perception when both parties are doing what is expected of them as Christians and they are filled with the Spirit, it turns out to be a happy marriage. Certainly it is much easier for her to submit if he's loving her that way, and certainly it is much easier for him to love her if she is cheerfully taking his lead. But on the other hand it does not say, "husbands love your wives provided she's decently submissive" or "wives, submit to your husbands when he is loving." That is looking for a tit-for-tat relationship. That way of thinking mistakes what the gospel is about – full of grace, the very structure of headship under the triune God in the pattern of creation, now renewed by the re-creation and the power of the Spirit.

### **1 Peter 3:1-7**

Dr. Carson noted the similarity of Peter's words in 1 Pet. 3:1-7 to Paul's "household" instructions, but he then drew attention to its special emphasis: the situation in which a wife is a believer and the husband is not. What does submission look like in that case? The closest parallel in Paul may be the discussion of mixed marriages in 1 Corinthians 7. With that focus, as opposed to Ephesians 5, the responsibility of the wife receives more attention. Also, in this passage, there is mention of different kinds of beauty, and there is no reference to Genesis 1-3.

### **"Likewise"**

Both verses 1 and 7 begin with the word *homoiôs* in the Greek, commonly rendered in English with something like "likewise" or "in the same way." The word can mean "also," and it could have that meaning here. But if it does mean "likewise," one must ask about the nature of the comparison, for it is not obvious in this context. Some try to argue that it means that husbands are to submit to their wives just as wives are to submit to their husbands, but Carson argued that this fails to recognize

the clear differences in the instructions given to each. In other words the language is so different in the two cases that to say that the "likewise" means that the two patterns must be exactly identical just does not fit the diversity of the descriptions.

Instead, though acknowledging it is not a majority view, Carson suggested that the comparison goes back to the cross of Christ mentioned in the previous paragraph (2:21-25). The example of Christ is explicitly applied to the behavior of slaves, but in using "likewise," Peter is applying it to a new situation, for it ultimately applies to all Christians.

The cross of Christ is unique in its substitutionary and sin-bearing function, but it also serves as a moral example. Like Christ, we are to be willing to lay down our rights, dying to ourselves as the means to loving others.<sup>26</sup> Peter intends that to be the model for both wives and husbands in their respective roles.

### **The Meaning of Submission**

Peter has already mentioned "submission" before he gets to its application to marriage in 3:1. All believers are to "Submit [themselves] for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (2:13). Again, the term requires an ordered array – you don't submit yourself to the garbage collector, but to the emperor. But nevertheless, this is "for the Lord's sake." We are to submit to governing authorities not simply out of a fear of punishment (though Romans 13 says they do have that God-given authority), but it is to please the Lord. That is the motivation and the context for a wife's submission to her husband. If that is the case, then if the husband wants her to do something that is transparently against the Lord, she must not do it. That pattern applies to all Christians in all situations.

Dr. Carson mentioned an instance he was familiar with in a Free Church where one of the evangelistic Bible studies that had formed amongst some of the gifted women evangelists in the church drew in a young woman who was spectacularly converted. She and her husband who had been married several years had what they themselves called an "open marriage." They not only gave each other permission to sleep with other people, they also sometimes went to wife-swapping parties. But when she got converted, she said to him, "I'm not going to say anything if you want to continue that lifestyle, but I can't. I'm a Christian. I can't do that anymore." So he divorced her. "I tell you," Carson concluded, "she acted honorably."

Peter's instruction here is not saying that a wife is to do whatever her husband tells her to do, no matter how sinful or foolish. Certainly, there is no place for abuse or perversion. Rather, this is simply what a marriage is supposed to look like. And within this framework, a wife has no right to change how marriage is supposed to work just because a husband is not a Christian.

---

<sup>26</sup> Again, as stated earlier, Carson was adamant that this text does not justify spousal abuse.

## **An Additional Motivation**

Because the context is that of a Christian wife married to a non-Christian husband, Peter offers an additional motivation for the wife's submission to her husband—so that he might be won over without words by her behavior (3:1). There is to be a winsomeness in her deportment that displays the beauty of the gospel.

This leads Peter to talk about a different kind of beauty—the ultimate beauty that doesn't come from outward adornment. Peter's point is not that a woman should make herself as plain as possible, but simply that her focus should be on the inner beauty of a godly character, a character that displays the transforming power of the gospel.

This "unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (3:4) is of great worth in God's sight, for it reflects the self-giving character of Christ himself. Significantly, Carson emphasized, this is not saying that you have to be a certain personality type—excluding extroverted women. That's not the point of the passage. It is rather focusing on a quality of character that can be exhibited by anyone who has been transformed by the gospel.

## **The Analogy of Sarah**

Peter continues in verse 5: "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear." Some commentators seem to want to turn this text upside down: in the Genesis narrative, they contend, it is Abraham who obeys Sarah (thus buttressing the claim for some sort of "mutual submission" in marriage). They point to two instances in support.

In the first, found in Genesis 16:2, Abraham agrees to Sarah's request that he sleep with Hagar so that a child would be raised up who would be legally hers (Sarah's) under the laws of the day. In Carson's view, however, this sounds more like Adam's submission to his wife's request that he eat the forbidden fruit! In other words, it's outright disobedience to God and a distrust in the promises of God to bring about what he said would take place.

The second instance of Abraham's "submission" to Sarah is found in Genesis 21:10-12. There Ishmael is growing up and Hagar has become a thorn in Sarah's side. She urges Abraham to throw her out, and he does. But if you read the text carefully, you see that Abraham does not want to do this and goes to God and asks God what he should do. And when God gives the sanction, Abraham obeys God, not Sarah.

How then does Sarah become a model of submission? Carson suggested that her submission to Abraham comes in going to a land that she doesn't know, away from her father's house and crossing several cultures. She follows her husband's lead. In any case, Peter encourages Christian women to submit like Sarah.

## Peter's Instructions to Husbands

Peter gives two commands to husbands: in the same way (that is under the cross, dying to self), be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect. Husbands are to relate to their wives with honor and reverence. They are to be considerate, kind, thoughtful and gentle. Their love is to be manifest in doing good to them. One way that is evident in a home is in the way a husband protects the honor of his wife in guarding the way that the children relate to her, not allowing any disrespectful or insolent behavior. Nor should there be any biting humor which in any way denigrates his wife. That's not living under the cross.

Peter offers two reasons for the husband to behave in this manner, understanding that he has moved from addressing a mixed marriage to a Christian marriage. First, she is the "weaker partner" and second, she is an heir with the husband of the gracious gift of life.

Taking the second of these first, Carson urged the importance of recognizing our common status before God, especially for those men involved in church leadership. It is too easy to think of yourself as "a cut above," as a more important Christian. This should never be, for Christians who know themselves best know that they are debtors to God's grace. And when one begins to think of himself like this, one of the first things to go is his prayer life – whether your individual prayer life or your prayer life with your wife. Husbands, respect your wives as common recipients of God's grace.

What are we to make of the wife being "the weaker vessel"? Carson dismissed any notion that women are less intelligent or clever or anything of that sort. Many have suggested that Peter is referring to physical stature. It is true that women are, on average, shorter and weaker. But physical strength does not seem to be the burning issue in this context.

Instead, Carson suggested that this reflects the notion that in this sort of polarity, the person who is in the submissive position in the pattern is in the more vulnerable, and thus weaker, place. It does not mean that the woman herself is morally weaker, nor that she is intellectually inferior. But if you set up this pattern in a fallen and broken world, the wife is in the more vulnerable place, putting all the more responsibility on the husband to treat her with respect and consideration.

When one fleshes this out in particular cultures, times and places the practices will be extraordinarily diverse. Carson averred that it was a good thing that God does not follow this instruction up with an abundance of rules. The danger with rules is that you think that by obeying the rules you have become holy. But you can obey rules and still not live under the cross. But if you live under the cross and follow this pattern, it will transform everything.

## Conclusion

Carson concluded by insisting that we hold to this demand to live under the pattern of the cross in our own lives, our own homes, our own marriages, and our churches—it is non-negotiable. This apostolic instruction as it is laid out for us in these biblical "household codes" is not given to us because God is mean or has got it wrong, or because the poor chap never really did understand 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. This is the Word of God and it is for our good.

## The Church: Teaching/Authority in the Context of I Timothy 2

Donald A. Carson

Dr. Carson moved finally to consider the role of men and women with regard to teaching and authority in the church, focusing on the very contentious text 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

He began with the observation of the convergence one often sees between those with a low view of Scripture and those Evangelicals who are complementarian. Both believe that the author of the letter does impose some kind of limit on women in the context of the ministry of the church. Those with a low view of Scripture, who do not feel bound to submit to the teaching of the text, argue either that Paul shows himself to be a misogynist, or, more likely, that Paul did not write it anyway. But the drift of Christianity moved from a kind of open-hearted, open-mindedness to increasing misogyny in the church, and it just gets worse as you move into the patristic age.

Those with a high view of Scripture, however, cannot write this passage off so easily. If they are egalitarian, they must demonstrate that the text is not laying down a universal pattern but a culturally limited one that has little or no bearing on our lives today. They do this in different ways.

One egalitarian approach is related to the expression "I do not permit . . ." in verse 12. It is argued that this is a negation of permission but not a true prohibition; it is a verb of concession, not command. But logically, there is a great deal of difference between not forbidding something and not permitting it—the latter, in fact, functions as a true prohibition, while the former is not. Carson argued that it is the difference between not forbidding his daughter to go to the store and not permitting her to do so.

## "Exercising Authority"

More commonly the dispute centers on the meaning of the verb *authentain*—commonly translated as "have authority," "usurp authority" or "domineer." This verb is quite rare; only seven instances (and this is disputed) of the verb are known from Paul's time and before, and three of them at least have a disputed meaning. Certainly by the time you get to the end of the second century, it simply means to "exercise authority" or "assume authority" or something similar. But it is argued, if this text means "I do not permit women to usurp authority over men;" or "to domineer men," or something like that, then this is not talking about women who are exercising authority in a non-domineering fashion, or a non-usurping fashion, but it is focused in a more narrow and negative framework.

In response to this, Carson observed that even if the verb has more negative overtones, it is strange that the prohibition of "usurping authority" should be directed only against women. Elsewhere Paul is pretty clear that he doesn't like the false apostles in Corinth usurping authority. It would seem prejudicial of Paul to speak only against women here if it is wrong for both men or women. On balance, Carson believes that the evidence lies on the side of understanding the verb to mean simply "to exercise authority."

## The Appeal to Adam and Eve

In this passage Paul grounds his instruction first to the order of creation and then to the order of the fall. Complementarians make much of this, stressing that the reasons to which Paul appeals for this limitation on women, whatever it may be, seem about as universal as you can possibly imagine. This is not a narrowly localized, culturally defined event, but something that touches all humankind.

Taking an egalitarian position, John Jefferson Davis has argued that Paul's argument is not as universal as it appears. Davis contends that Paul can apply the events of creation in different ways to make different points in different contexts. So, for example, in Romans 5:12-21, Paul's theological argument leads him to lay the blame for sin entering the world on Adam instead of on Eve (as in 1 Timothy 2:14). In using examples, Davis argues that Paul's appeal to the creation patterns, both the order of creation and the fall, can be applied in different ways, and we should not therefore think that it is more culturally transcendent than any other argument. It is shaped by the congregation to which Paul is addressing.

But, Carson responded, to say that Paul can apply what happens with Adam and Eve to different pastoral situations is one thing. To say that the actual basis of the argumentation is thus culturally relativized is quite another thing. The diversity of pastoral application doesn't overthrow the basic argument—in this case that the order of creation has a bearing on the differing roles of men and women.

Here Carson referred to his earlier exposition of the narrative of Genesis 2. The order of creation itself does not establish some hierarchy—after all, pigs were

created before both Adam and Eve. It is the structure of the narrative – because of the sequence, the woman was made for man. When the woman is deceived first, it is not because there is any hint in the text that she has a lower IQ or is more subject to her emotions, or anything of that sort. Rather, what you find in the text is a complete reversal of the pattern already established in creation. That is, instead of God speaking to the man and then the man finding the woman not only his partner but his helper, and the two of them then together ruling over the entire creation, the woman listens to the snake, the man listens to the woman, and neither of them listens to God. The entire pattern is reversed. Hence, the importance of Genesis 3:17 – "Because you listened to your wife . . ." That is the significance of the woman being deceived first in Genesis 3, which provides a universal grounding of the instructions of 1 Timothy 2.

### **A Warning Against False Teachers?**

Some try to limit the application of 1 Timothy 2 by connecting Paul's instructions to his warning about false teachers in 2 Timothy 3:6-7 and the "weak-willed women" who were being deceived. Thus, it is argued, the prohibition is only against women of a certain sort. In response, Carson first argued that it is not at all clear that 2 Timothy is referring to the same situation as 1 Timothy, and there is no indication in the context of 1 Timothy 2 that the focus is on weak-willed or gullible women. In fact, in 2 Timothy 3 the behavior of both men and women is roundly condemned. Why would Paul only single out women in 1 Timothy 2 in his prohibition? On the face of it, Paul's instructions there seem far more sweeping than any particular situation in Ephesus, and bringing 2 Timothy 3 back into 1 Timothy 2 seems unwarranted.

### **The Context of 1 Timothy 2**

Paul's specific instructions for men and women in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 are grounded in his concern for the gospel and its work in the world. 1 Timothy 2 begins with a "therefore," pointing back to the glorious gospel (cf. 1:11-17), which appears to have been forsaken by Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20), perhaps due to the challenge of persecution.

Paul urges prayer, therefore, for everyone, with special concern for those in authority, for the end that there may be peace and stability. This is what best allows for the spread of the gospel, as opposed to situations of massive anarchy and rising violence. The spread of the gospel is necessary because it is a universal message, based on the fact that it comes from the one true God (2:5). Monotheism, then, provides the ground for universal mission, for only within a monotheistic framework does the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4,5), for example, make sense. Only the one true God can demand our complete and absolute allegiance. Hence, the universal scope of the gospel is emphasized (vv. 3-6). This is at the core of Paul's own apostleship (v. 7).

Paul then draws an implication of this concern for the gospel in the instructions that follow, again including a "therefore" at the beginning of verse 8.

Paul first addresses the men, and the emphasis here is on the manner of their praying, presumably in the context of their gathered worship—it is to be without quarrelling or disputing. Carson contended that there is a way of "being religious" that is much more about personal aggrandizement and one-upmanship, than true godliness. Such pretense is powerless to further the gospel to all people. Instead, Paul urges the true transformation of the gospel to be evident in their religious observance.

Then Paul turns to the women and he addresses the issue of vanity and self-promotion which again detracts from the gospel. Instead, they are to be active in doing good as a demonstration of the gospel's power. This sets the scene for the paragraph under discussion.

Thus in the opening section of chapter 2, Paul has set forth a sweeping vision bound up with the glorious gospel referred to in chapter 1. His passion is for worldwide evangelism, for mission, for living out what it means to bow to the supremacy of God and the sole mediation of Christ under the authority of the apostles. So what does Paul want of women?

### **"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission"**

Carson emphasized Paul's command that a woman should learn. Women are not to be relegated to ignorance. Nor are they to be restricted to cooking and bearing children. They are here encouraged to be full disciples of Jesus, engaging in that lifelong task of learning to obey all that he commanded.

And they are to learn in "full submission." On the meaning of "submission," Carson referred his listeners to the earlier discussion of Ephesians 5:22. Submission has a prominent place in New Testament teaching—children are to submit to their parents; slaves are to submit to their master; wives are to submit to their husbands; Christians are to submit to those over them in Christian leadership; we are to submit ourselves to God; and as part of that we are to submit to governing authorities. Moreover, it is not just in the area of human relationships where this submission language is used. We are also told that all things have been submitted to and will ultimately submit to Christ, whether willingly now or in great fear or dread on the last day, when every knee will bow. Demons submit to the rule of Christ. The church is to submit to Christ as her head. And when all things have been made subject to him, Christ himself will submit to God the Father. Carson stressed that one of the things that is obvious about the *hupotassein* word group is that it is submission always and invariably in some sort of ordered array. Barring the disputed passages, it is never in a context where there is some sort of a mutual submission all around.

Again, submission in the New Testament is not a begrudging admission of weakness, a "surrender" like that of a defeated wrestler, fully of pain and humiliation. The Bible calls the church to submit to Christ joyfully, gladly,

voluntarily and happily because she knows it is for her good. It is not a statement of inferiority, for Christ, who is fully equal to his Father, also submits to his will. Thus, we ought not to have negative associations with the important biblical concept.

### **The Context of This Submission**

Dr. Carson then moved to a consideration of the context of this submission: To whom is the woman to be in submission? He suggested that the argument runs as follows: The words "in quietness" are at the beginning of verse 11 and at the end of verse 12 and serve as bookends. They underline the main point Paul is making about the conduct of women in this passage—a point which, in some ways, has already been made about the quiet, godly life Christians are to lead (2:2).

The two things that are commanded in verse 11—that women are to learn and to do so "in quietness"—are then contrasted with the two prohibited activities in verse 12—women are not to teach nor are they to exercise authority over a man. The circumstances of their learning and the prohibition of having authority over men point us to the setting of their submission—it is a Christian gathering. Elsewhere women certainly do teach, and they are encouraged to teach—other women (Titus 2:3) and children. Moreover, there are instances where women teach quite powerfully in the context of early church life. One thinks of Priscilla and Aquila, for example, teaching a young man named Apollos (Acts 18:24-26; and the mention of Priscilla's name first is probably significant). Whatever the precise prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, it seems to be in the context of the gathered church. For this reason, someone has called this the prohibition of "the church-recognized public teaching authority" of women over men. This does not prohibit other kinds of teaching for women.

As is evident in 1 Timothy 3, not all men have responsibility to teach and lead a congregation, so we can assume that Paul is not saying in this passage that all women are to submit themselves to all men all the time. Rather, women are to be in submission in the gathered church, that is, in the assembly when the teaching is happening—in submission to what is taught and to those men who are teaching. In other words, Carson concluded, on a straightforward reading of the text the limitation is that women are not to be authoritative teachers of the gathered household of God.

### **One Restriction or Two?**

A further question to ask of this text is whether "teaching" and "exercising authority" are two restrictions or just one? Though the grammatical details of the argument are addressed elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> Carson asserted that the authority issue in the

---

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12" in Andreas J. Köstenberger, et al., *Women in the Church: a Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). In this watershed essay on the syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12, Köstenberger argues that οὐδέ in 1 Timothy 2:12 joins two related but distinct ideas. In 2008, Philip Payne published an article in *New Testament Studies* contesting Köstenberger's earlier thesis. Köstenberger issued two

early church is itself bound up with teaching—authority is exercised precisely *through* the ministry of the Word. And even here, the church, as is clear in 2 Corinthians 10-13, has the responsibility to listen carefully and well. And when false teaching is being given, a man’s authority is not preserved just because he has the job or the title. At some point the church has to turn the false teacher out. And Paul says if the church won’t do it, when he gets there he’ll do it for them. So there is no authority that is bound up with the man because he is a man or because he is an elder. It is bound up with this teaching function of the Word of God. Thus the ultimate authority is Christ reigning through the church through his Word.

### **Paul's Rationale**

At this point Paul turns to the book of Genesis to justify his instructions: "for Adam was born first, then Eve." Carson insisted that this is not a matter of mere sequence. Paul is working out the theological implications of the Genesis narrative, implications which Carson explored in his earlier lecture. This is reinforced by Paul's further reference to Genesis: "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." The Genesis story of the fall traces the reversal of the entire order of creation, and that must not happen in the church.

### **"Saved through Childbirth"**

Carson recognized that the closing verse of this section, "But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety" (v. 15), is notoriously difficult. Several interpretations have been offered.

Some have suggested that this means that Christian women who are truly pious and submissive will be kept safe in childbirth, spared the undue pain that resulted from the fall. But empirical evidence suggests that godly women die in childbirth, and pain-free, drug-free labor this side of Genesis 3 is an oxymoron. This interpretation is not plausible.

Is then Paul advocating salvation by works—that the act of bearing a child is salvific? Though advocated in some circles, this makes little sense, for no other reason than that it is hard on single women!

A third interpretation suggests that Paul is actually making a reference to Christ—the "childbearing" he is referring to is actually the bearing of "the Child," Jesus Christ. The text would be picking up the promise of Genesis 3:15 where the

---

rejoinders in this journal—a brief one in 2008 ("Andreas Köstenberger Responds to Philip Payne on 1 Timothy 2:12," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* Volume 13.2 (Winter 2008), 4.) and a longer one in 2009 ("The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12: A Rejoinder to Philip B. Payne," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14.2 (Fall 2009), 37–40.). What follows below is one last interaction between Payne and Köstenberger on the syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12: "Discussion of 1 Timothy 2:12," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* Volume 15.2 (Fall 2010), 28-32.

seed of the woman will eventually crush the serpent's head. In that case, I Timothy 2:15 means that even though she was deceived and became a sinner, Eve will be saved through the birth of Christ since he defeated Satan. And so, like Eve, women generally will be saved if they continue to live lives of faith, love and holiness with self-control. This interpretation has the benefit of connecting verse 15 with the reference to Eve that immediately precedes.

Though this interpretation is possible, Carson contended that if this is what Paul had intended to say, there are a lot of other ways he could have said it. Instead, he offered a fourth interpretation which tied what Paul says here more closely to what is said in the letter as a whole about salvation and the behavior that ought to accompany it.

In 4:16 Paul urges Timothy: "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." Clearly, Paul is not suggesting that Timothy becomes his own savior, or that he actually saves people without reference to any other source. Paul is clear that only Jesus can do that, for he is the sole mediator (2:5). But by faithfully discharging his responsibilities of godly living to people, Timothy ensures that neither he nor those in his charge will depart from the truth and shipwreck their faith, and thus their faith will be preserved and the very real dangers besetting it will be avoided. Thus in this way he saves the people and himself.

This helps us to understand what Paul means, likewise, in reference to women in 2:15. Paul is not talking about childbirth being a means of salvation, but about Christian women being spiritually preserved or saved from the temptations and fate of Eve and the dangers of false teaching, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control, and childbearing is a part of that. And for most women, it is a distinctive part of that.

Carson's point was that Paul was not saying that bearing and raising children is the means to salvation, but that it can be one of the *accompanying circumstances* of salvation. That is to say, in order to enter into a state of spiritual blessing, women need not abandon their distinctive God-given role as mothers. Of course, not all women will bear children, but what is more distinctive of a woman's role than that of motherhood? Even today childbearing remains the most distinctive difference in the responsibilities between men and women. Paul may be assuring the women of Ephesus that it is not through *escaping* that God-given role, but precisely in *embracing* it that they can experience God's saving love and grace—if, of course, they also hold on to the most fundamental Christian graces of faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This implies that bearing and raising children is not a *curse* imposed upon women from which they need to escape—as some false teachers may contend.<sup>28</sup> It is,

---

<sup>28</sup> Moreover, this verse may be understood within a context in which women were being told that their role *as mothers* was not significant, even that it was *detrimental* to their spiritual health. There is some hint of this in chapter 4 when Paul refers to certain false teachers who

instead, a great *blessing*—and God's blessing on a woman can be found through it and in the midst of it.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, women need not feel that they have to abandon the home as a central focus of their time and energy and become like men, seeking an authoritative teaching role in the church. They can be who they are and who God made them to be and discover great fulfillment and even the riches of the saving grace of God. In other words, verse 15 assures Christian women that their faith will be kept safe if they embrace their particular God-given responsibilities and delight in them.

### **Inequality and the Relationships within the Trinity**

Certainly, Carson conceded, there are many today who object to this sort of reading of Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, because it feels so inequitable in a culture in which equality of importance and equality of significance is so often bound up with exercising authority and the right to be in charge. In addressing that objection, Carson returned to a theme he had considered earlier—the submission of the Son to the Father in the trinity.

Recent discussion of the trinitarian relationships has centered on whether or not Christ's submission to his Father is an expression of the ontological trinity or is restricted to the economic trinity. Or in more popular terms, the debate is whether Christ's submission reflects the very nature of relationships in the eternal godhead, even in pre-creation existence, or is tied instead to the way God has manifested himself as triune in revelation, supremely in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In his incarnation, Jesus is transparently subject to his Father. So, it is argued, if you draw comparisons between Jesus' submission to his Father and a woman's submission to her husband, you have to recognize that the first part of this parallelism is only temporary and is bound up only with the incarnation. It is not part of who God is in and of himself, and it is not part of how it will be at the consummation when Christ finishes his mediatorial work and turns everything over to his Father and there is a kind of oneness all over again.

In addition, there is a vast amount of literature from the end of the second century on which is trying to show that Jesus truly is God. It comes to a climax in the third and fourth centuries, where there is a concern to show that the Son of God is not in himself inferior to the divine Father in any way. There is a complete equality of authority, ontology and being. Otherwise you lose trinitarianism altogether and instead move toward some form of Arianism, and all of today's Jehovah's Witnesses will be pleased.

In Carson's view, much of this debate is misconstrued. First, the Bible actually gives us very little information about the ontological trinity. It focuses on God as he

---

forbid people to marry (4:3). Paul, instead, in 5:14 encourages younger widows to remarry and to bear children--using the same word we find here. (Editor)

<sup>29</sup> Carson noted the decline in birthrates around the developed world and the negative economic consequences that are emerging.

has actually disclosed himself in space/time history. We know of the second person of the trinity, the Son of God, only as he has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, the son of Mary. In addition, our knowledge of the divine Son of God is clouded by some difficult Gospel passages, like Jesus not knowing certain things (e.g., Mark 13:32). How are we to understand this hypostatic union of the divine and human natures? The biblical texts about the Son of God are all in terms of the economic Godhead, and we are at a loss for insight into the ontological trinity.

Dr. Carson contended that the closest we may come to explicit passages of that sort are those that speak of the Father "sending" his Son into the world. One might argue that in this expression, the term "Son" refers only proleptically to what the eternal Word would become in his incarnate state. But that is a pretty tortuous way of reading the text. More likely, the Father sending his Son refers to a time before the incarnation takes place. If so, it is difficult to escape some notion that in the eternal ontological Godhead, there is not only perfect equality, but a difference in roles.

Further, Carson noted that when Paul draws a comparison between Christ and the church and husbands and wives, it is the economic trinity that is in view. Christ in his incarnate state provides the model for Christian behavior, and it is a model that points us to the cross—husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. The pattern is established from how Christ lives and operates as the eternal Son of God who goes to the cross on our behalf—that is, from the economic trinity, not from some ill-defined but somehow more egalitarian ontological trinity.

### **Conclusion**

Carson concluded that if we have a high view of Scripture and we deal fairly with the text, Paul does impose some restrictions here. These are not restrictions on all women teaching in any context whatsoever. But there is a headship in the family that belongs to the man, even as there is also a call to the man to love his wife as Christ loved the church (self-sacrificially for her good).

And here there is a restriction on the church-recognized teaching authority of the woman over the man. Carson didn't see how to get around that. But, in fact, he went farther in saying he didn't want to get around it. Because if this teaching is from the Word of God, it is good. It is grounded not only in the creation account of Genesis 2, but also in the reversal of the creation order that is bound up in the fall of Genesis 3. And we will reject that order to our spiritual and social detriment.

### **Application**

By way of application, Dr. Carson first asserted that anyone who holds a complementarian position and who presents it primarily as a way to put women down has misunderstood the tone and structure of the biblical teaching. He noted that the Anglican diocese of Sydney, Australia, that is strongest in the world at

preserving complementarianism also has the highest number of paid pastoral staff workers who are women. None are permitted to be ordained as Anglican priests, but they are encouraged to study and are taken on in local churches doing all kinds of useful evangelism and teaching.

Local churches must seek to work out what this biblical complementarianism means in their own situation. As with male headship in the family, how this is fleshed out in churches can vary a great deal.

For example, does it mean that a woman can't teach a Sunday school class? Or is it OK for a Sunday school class, but not for the whole congregation? Or for the whole congregation when it's having a party, but not on a Sunday morning? And the short answer is, the text does not answer those questions. So provided Christian leaders really do want this text to speak to their local church, Dr. Carson was prepared to be pretty flexible on how it works out. A key question is how is the church's authoritative teaching recognized in the local context.

Carson admitted that he has his own preferences, but at the end of the day he would not want the hard cases to be an excuse for overturning what the Word of God says. But he also wouldn't want the Word of God to become some kind of legalism. And somewhere between those two you have to make some judgment calls. But in that Anglican diocese they have worked it out rather stunningly – as a woman is the second or third person added to the staff. So he dared to ask, in the EFCA, how many women teaching on staff do you have in your church? If complementarianism means nothing more than saying no, then it is as ugly as interpreting "headship" to mean nothing more than keeping a woman down when we've been constrained by Paul to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

A second factor in our application are the perceptions that are in many ways culturally driven by some painful and ugly things in our history. This does not just include overt acts of misogyny, but social factors that have complicated these issues. The two world wars produced a disproportionate number of females, which affected missionary ministry – with more women engaged in ministry on the mission field. The feminization of the church in the West has further distorted the gender balance. The extreme emphases of the feminist movement have also contributed to the difficulty of applying these truths in our culture.

Finally, Dr. Carson expressed his concern for what comes under the heading of "women's ministry" or "men's ministry" that focuses primarily on men's or women's issues. There is a place for targeting certain demographic groups, but what is needed is a much greater emphasis on the gospel first and foremost. We need to be casting a counter-cultural vision that is greater than merely debating the roles of men and women. We must not simply think that forbidding some role to women will make things right. The issues are much more massive than that, and to address them we need nothing less than the whole counsel of God.

## Closing Comments

In a few closing comments, Dr. Yarbrough first spoke about the great opportunity the church has for living out the cross in our current culture. Now is the time to put our training—whether we are men or women—at the disposal of Great Commission gospel priorities.

He then affirmed that the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to the church also gave the church its structure. We must not pit giftedness or even a sense of calling against that biblical structure. All Scripture is inspired by God, and if we believe in the giftedness of people, unless God contradicts himself, we also believe that he is not going to gift and call people to do things in the church that go against the structure that he ordains and that normally obtains in marriages and church settings.

In his final remarks, Dr. Carson emphasized that he had tried to show how the issues of man/woman relationships in the home are really tied to much larger structures—structures of how people live, how Christians must be counter-cultural, and a church pattern that does not depend on a few rules about what women are allowed to do and not allowed to do. The Bible prescribes gospel living that is deeply grounded in the very structure of Scripture from creation all the way to consummation.

In this regard, he commended two recent books that reflect that emphasis. The first, by Tim and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2011), has a particularly helpful chapter on submission in marriage written by Kathy Keller. He considered it the best chapter he has seen in a marriage context reflecting a deep theological patterning of all of Scripture in a practical, godly sense.

The second book Dr. Carson recommended is *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women* (Kingsford, Australian: Matthias Media, 2012) by Claire Smith. Smith, who has a Ph.D. in New Testament studies, is Australian. In his view she works through the key passages with rare confidence, even-handedness, and attractiveness.

In closing, Dr. Carson commended the EFCA for being bold enough to take on this topic. Many within the Christian community have backed away from clear doctrinal truth in an effort to accommodate the preferences of our culture in order to make the gospel more attractive. But in Carson's observation, the churches around the country that are doing best at actual evangelism of people who are biblically illiterate and outside the camp are virtually without exception churches that are strong in doctrine. These churches may take on very different styles, but they emphasize strong exegetical and doctrinal preaching. He called us to be of good courage, to be wise, and to be careful in our preaching and teaching. As leaders in Christ's church we are called to build a counter-culture, for that is what the gospel of God looks like as it works itself out in the church of the living God in anticipation of the new heavens and the new earth.

## **Panel Discussions**

The conference also included three panel discussions in which those engaged in local church ministry discussed how they seek to implement the complementarian position practically and pastorally in the context of life and ministry in the home and the church.

The following are the questions that guided these discussions:

### **Panel 1: Culture and Hermeneutics**

1. What are some specific ways the culture influences and affects the church and its teaching, specifically understanding the roles of men and women?
2. What are some of the cultural pressure points for men and women regarding the family, the church and leadership within the church?
3. What kind of affect has culture had on our reading and understanding of the Bible, specifically in the realm of gender and the roles of men and women?
4. As we engage in this important discussion regarding the roles of men and women, generally, and the complementarian position, specifically, is this to be considered a gospel issue? What are some vital biblical truths and important relational principles you live by and seek to model to others?

### **Panel 2: Equal in Essence and Dignity, Distinction in Roles: The Home**

1. How do you understand the biblical teaching of the headship relationship (i.e. equality in essence and dignity and distinction in roles) in the home?
2. How is this lived out between husband and wife? What about parents and children?
3. How specific is this to be applied across families, viz. is it all going to look the same in its application in various families?
4. What do you affirm are the essentials of this teaching, and what would you consider to be non-essentials? As leaders how do we best help others to determine how they ought to live out the essentials and non-essentials in their own homes, and how do you communicate and live this without becoming legalistic?

**Panel 3:**  
**Full Use of Gifts Within God's Ordained Structure:**  
**The Church**

1. How is the complementarian position understood and applied in the context of the local church where you serve?
2. How do you encourage full use of spiritual gifts of women in ministry within these God-ordained structures? How do you lead in and through this? What do you perceive to be weaknesses, or what can or should be done better?
3. What are the parameters of the teaching/authority ministry (teaching and leadership), i.e. what is acceptable, allowed, encouraged and fostered? How do you understand and respond to the question of the title "pastor" used for women on staff in the local church?
4. Beyond the clear and explicit biblical teachings of "equality of essence, distinction of roles in the home and the church," how do you understand and support ministries that are an extension of the church 1) without going against or undermining that teaching and 2) without extending the leadership structure of the church too far to include ministries that are not the church?

