

EVANGELICAL FEMINISM

INTRODUCTION

After several decades of debate, most evangelicals recognize that *feminism*, or what many now are calling *egalitarianism*,¹ continues to be one of the “most important issues facing the evangelical church.”² One author defines this issue under the subtitle “Gender Roles in the Church, (Egalitarianism vs. Complementarianism).” He explains this “touchy issue” in this way: “Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ ‘there is neither male nor female.’ On the other hand, 1 Timothy 2:12 appears to prohibit women from certain teaching and authority positions in the church. What are the implications of these verses and how should they be harmonized? *Evangelical egalitarians* argue that equality between the sexes means that there should be no functional distinctions between men and women in the church. Thus, spiritually qualified women should be allowed to function in authority roles such as pastor, teacher, and elder. *Evangelical complementarians* argue that men and women are equal in essence, but this equality does not cancel God-ordained functional distinctions between men and women. Thus, there are certain positions in the church such as pastor and elder that are reserved only for men.”³ The Bible teaches that there are some God-ordained functional distinctions between men and women that should be maintained. Gender distinctions in functional roles do not make one inferior to the other. Male and female roles are meant to be mutually complementary. The purpose of this paper is to advocate for the *complementarian* view regarding gender distinctions as they relate to the home, the church, and missions. But we will first briefly discuss the historical influence of secular feminism on our present world system, and the subsequent rise of evangelical feminism followed by Part A, a discussion of some basic assumptions on which evangelical feminists (men and women) attempt to build their case and Part B, evangelical feminism as it relates to the home, the church, and missions.

SECULAR FEMINISM IN THE WORLD

Feminism has increasingly impacted the world especially over the past couple of centuries. “In the 1790s and early 1800s, a flurry of books on the rights of women and the equality of the sexes signaled the beginning of the ‘first wave’ of feminism.”⁴ By 1850 concerned women in the USA and other countries had begun efforts toward uniting for change. “In 1920 American women obtained the right to vote. By 1930, they were entering the work force in greater numbers.”⁵ The cry for “women’s liberation” has continued to mushroom worldwide especially from the 1960s until now. In recent years the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the USA and other groups around the world have successfully applied social and political pressure to implement change.

The original and continuing motivation for the feminist movement is the carnal mind of man – male and female. There has been reluctance, even resistance, on the part of many *women* to accept

¹ “Feminism” and “egalitarianism,” are used interchangeably in this paper. However, the meaning of *feminism* is more restricted to “political, economic, and social equality of the sexes,” whereas *egalitarianism* refers to “equal political, economic, social, and civil rights for all people.” It is likely that most feminists are in fact egalitarian. Our concern is evangelical feminism, or “gender egalitarianism” as it relates to the home, church and missions.

² Michael J. Vlach, “The 9 Most Important Issues Facing the Evangelical Church,” www.theologicalstudies.org

³ Ibid.

⁴ “The History of Feminism and the Church,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (JBMW)*, 3-4 (Winter 1998). An Excerpt and summary from Mary Kassian’s book, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992).

⁵ “The History of Feminism and the Church,” *JBMW* 3-4 (Winter 1998).

a biblical, subordinate role to males in any way. But much of the impetus for the movement stems from the cold facts of history. On a worldwide scale women have suffered all kinds of human indignities and discriminatory injustices by domineering and abusive *males*. There has been an obvious need for change. And there has been considerable change, much of it good. We acknowledge with gratitude any liberation from all sorts of historical cruelty and unwarranted segregation and discrimination inflicted upon women. Sadly, such abuse continues in many people groups around the world. Although some change has been good, much of it has *not* been good. It is deeply concerning how feminism is changing our world, homes, churches, and parachurch groups in ways that conflict with Scripture. To the feminist, equality of the sexes has meant equality in all functional roles. They have fought and won in their demands for “liberation from the bondage of home life.” Influenced by *secular feminism*, a *religious feminism* was spawned from which came *evangelical feminism*.

THE RISE OF EVANGELICAL FEMINISM

In 1776 the first Shaker community was founded in Troy, NY by “Mother” Ann Lee who “regarded herself as the ‘female principle in Christ’ and Jesus as the male principle.”⁶ Feministic views and practice have also played a big part in other major cults such as Seventh Day Adventism, founded mostly on the “revelations,” and the teaching-writing ministries of Ellen G. White after 1844. Later Mary Baker Eddy founded Christian Science or the Church of Christ, Scientist during the last quarter of the 19th century. Although considered cultic by many in the early days, Pentecostalism, which started soon after Agnes Ozman “received the baptism” with speaking in tongues in 1901, became the major evangelical promoter of feministic views and practice. And, for the most part, the charismatic movement has always embraced Pentecostal feminism. This has been largely the result of confidence in extra-biblical revelation coming by way of the charismatic gifts of tongues and prophecy given to women and men alike.⁷ The International Association of Women Preachers (IAWP) was launched in 1919 in St. Louis, MO. IAWP’s first issue (in 1922) of *The Women’s Pulpit* listed 150 members.

In 1952, Katharine Bliss wrote a survey report for the World Council of Churches on “The Service and Status of Women in the Church.” “Her report called for a reevaluation of women’s role in church... During the 1960s Christian feminists set themselves on a course parallel to that pursued by feminists in secular society. [She also made this claim:] Women...should be allowed to do everything a man could do, in the same manner and with the same recognized status. Only this would constitute true equality.”⁸ In 1974, an assortment of evangelical women established the Evangelical Women’s Caucus. However, by 1987, “a number of women found it necessary to withdraw from this organization in disagreement with its apparent endorsement of lesbianism. Subsequently, the remaining members renamed the group the Evangelical & Ecumenical Women’s Caucus [EEWC], a change that accurately reflected its departure from the boundaries of evangelical Christian doctrine. The dissenting members of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus formed another group, Christians for Biblical Equality [CBE], whose philosophy reflected that of the original caucus.”⁹ The very liberal EEWC “welcomes members of any gender, race, ethnicity, color, creed, marital status,

⁶ Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective*, (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), 17.

⁷ Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the International Church of the Foursquare, Kathryn Kuhlman, the faith healer, and Joyce Meyer, one of many TV evangelists, are only three examples.

⁸ “The History of Feminism and the Church” *JBMW* 3-4 (Winter 1998).

⁹ *Ibid.*

sexual orientation, religious affiliation....”¹⁰ Composed of both men and women, in 1989 CBE became a member of the National Association of Evangelicals.¹¹ These and other groups have influenced the church to increasingly accept feministic views. Sensing the need to counter feminism, the conservative Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) was formed in 1987 in the USA.

Evangelical feminism is largely built on several related faulty assumptions concerning Scripture. What follows is a discussion of some of these feminist assumptions:

PART A – EVANGELICAL FEMINISM: SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

1. EQUALITY IN GALATIANS 3:28

Feminist View: Feminists have placed a very high status on Galatians 3:28 as the foundational “keystone” for their interpretation of all other Scripture related to gender-role issues. The last part of the verse states that “*there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ*” (NASB). One of their own has identified this one verse as the “Magna Carta of Humanity.”¹² It is thought to be “the foundation for a new social order in the church.”¹³ It is claimed to be “the fundamental Pauline theological basis for the inclusion of women and men as equal and mutual partners in all of the ministries of the church.”¹⁴ In other words, “Gender, social condition, and racial considerations are all swept away by Galatians 3:28.”¹⁵ Therefore, “All social distinctions between men and women should [be] erased in the church.”¹⁶ This sort of thinking must have influenced a prominent feminist missionary leader to write, “What is God’s absolute principle that should guide all of our thinking concerning men and women? It is equality. Absolute equality... This is the principle that should rule in the body of Christ and ultimately in every society and every nation: the absolute equality of male and female”¹⁷ Feminists generally understand this “absolute equality” of Gal. 3:28 to mean that any headship-submission, gender-role distinctions placed in effect at creation and the fall (Gen. 2:18-25; 3:16) no longer apply after the Cross. Feminists insist that all *the hard, difficult verses*,¹⁸ should be consistently interpreted in harmony with their understanding of the *obviously clear verse* of Gal. 3:28. With this hermeneutical assumption, the claim is made: “Paul states the

¹⁰ www.eewc.com

¹¹ This is understandable since the larger Pentecostal denominations such as the AOG are so prominent.

¹² Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 142. Jewett is/was professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹³ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995) 101.

¹⁴ David M. Scholer, “Galatians 3:28 and the Ministry of Women in the Church,” *Theology, News and Notes* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, June 1998) 19-22. Cited in Peter R. Schemm, Jr, “Galatians 3:28 — Proof-text or Context?” *JBMW* 8:1 (Spring 03), 24.

¹⁵ Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Toward an Egalitarian Hermeneutic of Faith.” www.cbeinternational.org

¹⁶ Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All Were Meant to Be* 72. Cited in A. Duane Litfin, “Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136:543 (Jul 79), 260.

¹⁷ Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton. *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*. (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 42-3. Although Cunningham was the founder of YWAM, all his egalitarian views are not held by all YWAM leaders. Steve Heitland is one. See his, “YWAM Leadership Embraces Egalitarianism,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, [JBMW] 7:1, (Spring 2002), 133.

¹⁸ “Hard passages” are those which clearly teach against equality of roles between men and women in the home and church such as 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:17.

basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Cor. 14:34f or 1 Tim. 2:11f, they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not vice versa.”¹⁹

Biblical View: In light of the Galatian context, Gal. 3:28 is clearly meant to convey the tremendous Gospel truth of the oneness, the unity, the spiritual equality of *all* believers *regardless* of obvious ethnic, gender and social role distinctions which remain. Such spiritual equality does not obliterate the distinctions. All who come to faith in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles, males or females, slaves, or freemen, are unified as liberated sons in the one family of God. As believers, we are all equally one in Christ spiritually and thus fellow heirs of the spiritual blessings of Abraham. The redemptive message of Galatians is the Gospel of freedom in Christ, which itself is the greatest force for “liberation” in the world. All mankind are/were in bondage to sin (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:20), and the law as a yoke of slavery (Gal. 4:1-3). But Christ came to liberate us captives (Is. 61:1; Lk. 4:18). The Good News is that all believers whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or freeman are liberated from slavery to sin (Jn. 8:36; Rom. 6:6-7, 18), from law (Rom. 7:6; Gal. 3:19 – 4:5, 21-31) and eventually from even our slavery to corruption (Rom. 8:21). It was for freedom that Christ set us free (Gal. 5:1). All believers are justified the same way and with the same results. That’s the context of Galatians 3:28. This one verse was not written to negate the distinction of God-ordained gender roles and function. The verse does not address issues of headship and subordination. There is no biblical basis whatsoever for feminists to use Gal. 3:28 as a proof-text in their diligent but futile attempts to negate all the other Scriptures that so clearly teach functional distinctions in gender roles. To support their faulty assumption on the meaning of this one verse (Gal. 3:28), feminists have been forced to build their case further on many other faulty assumptions regarding Scripture. Some have to do with their teaching on creation and the fall.

2. CREATION, FALL AND REDEMPTION

Feminist View: Feminists believe the “Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word ‘helper’ [*ezer*, Gen. 2:18] ...conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority... that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen. 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18-20 the word ‘suitable’ (*kenegdo*) denotes equality and adequacy.”²⁰ (It is often emphasized that God is our *helper*, and He is superior to us). However, “man and woman were co-participants in the Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order.”²¹ “Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God’s creation design is to be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the Biblical text.”²² Feminists often emphasize that “before the Fall, 50 percent of the leadership was female.”²³ Supposedly, there was no leadership-subordination in male-female roles. As a result of the fall, subordination of the woman was instigated (Gen. 3:16) and put into effect until Christ Himself

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 190. Cited in Paul W. Felix, “The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism.” *Masters Seminary Journal [MSJ]* 5:2 (Fall 94) 159.

²⁰ “Men, women and Biblical Equality,” www.cbeinternational.org [The word, *helper*, often refers to God.]

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 41.

²³ Cunningham & Hamilton, “Why Not Women? ...,” 54.

restored the original creation order.

Biblical View: Genesis teaches that both men and women are equal in dignity and worth (1:24-28), distinctive in functional roles (2:18-25) and negatively impacted by the curse (3:7-24). Both Adam and Eve were created as fully formed humans and in God's image. Thus, they were created equal in nature (as distinct from animals), and with equal dignity, worth and importance. As mankind, they were given rule over the rest of creation. (Gen. 1:26-28; 5:1). This equality has never changed. However, there were also some significant biblical distinctions *prior to the fall*: 1) God made Adam, not Eve, the central character in the creation account;²⁴ 2) Adam was male and Eve was female with obvious sexual and role distinctions; 3) God gave the first male, not the first female, the given name, Adam, which was His Hebrew, generic/class title, *adam*, for mankind, i.e. all humans, male and female (Gen. 1:26-27); 4) God considered Adam, not Eve, as the representative head of the first family and the whole human race (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45); 5) Adam, not Eve, was created first; 6) Prior to Eve's creation, Adam was given divine revelation and responsibility for care of the garden and naming all living creatures; 7) Eve was created from Adam, not Adam from Eve (1 Cor. 11:8); 8) Eve was created as a helper²⁵ suitable for Adam and "for the man's sake" and not vice versa (1 Cor. 11:9); 9) The prohibition was directly given to Adam, not Eve. She wasn't even created yet; 10) Presumably Adam taught Eve about the prohibition. And Eve was held accountable for what she learned from Adam; 11) Adam, rather than either God or Eve, gave the first female the generic/class name, *woman*. 12) Eve, not Adam, was deceived by Satan (1 Tim. 2:13-14; 2 Cor. 11:3); 13) And Eve, not Adam, took the initiative and ate the forbidden fruit first and then gave some to Adam who followed her lead and ate also. Yet *after the fall*: 1) As the one in God-ordained leadership in that first family, God first summoned Adam, not Eve, to give account for what he had done (Gen. 3:9); 2) God held Adam, not Eve, accountable for the entrance of sin into the world (Rom. 5:14-19); 3) According to God Himself, what was his sin? He "hearkened unto" or "listened to" the voice of his wife and then ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:17). That's why many have referred to Adam's sin of disobedience, at least in part, as *role reversal*; and 4) Adam gave the woman her personal name, *Eve* (Gen. 3:20).²⁶

These pre-fall distinctions are so meaningful that the Apostle Paul used some of them in his arguments to support his teaching that "*the head of the woman is the man*" (1 Cor. 11:3). Although admittedly a difficult passage, Paul indicates that a man should not cover his head in contrast to the woman (11:4-7) "*since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man*" (11:7). And why is this? "For [or because] *man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake*" (11:8-9). The context makes it clear that Paul is arguing for the headship of man over woman. Again, Paul indicates that "*a woman [should] quietly receive instruction with entire submission*" and not "*to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet*" in the church (1 Tim. 2:11-12). And why is this? "*For [or because] it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression*" (2:13-14). And these words were

²⁴ "All the action and events revolve around the man.... he occupies center stage. Everything else, including the woman, has a supporting role." Jack Cottrell, *A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation, Gender Roles & The Bible: Creation, the Fall, & Redemption* (Joplin: College Press, 1994), 80.

²⁵ Although any *divine* helper is superior to us in functional role, a *human* helper, as Eve, is subordinate in role.

²⁶ There are many scriptural examples of authority figures who have either named or renamed subordinates.

written years after the finished work of Christ. They are meant for application during this present church age. Paul argues that the order of creation rather than the consequences of the curse is the basis for the headship-submission principle.

A typical *false* assumption of feminists is that role subordination indicates inferiority. If this were true, then it would mean that God the Son is inferior to God the Father simply because the Son functions in a subordinate role to the Father. However, complementary roles in the Trinity, in the home, and in the church have nothing to do with either superiority or inferiority. The woman's creation as a "helper...for man's sake" implies the woman's subordinate, yet complementary, non-inferior role. The fact that the term often refers to God Himself as our "helper" simply reveals what a glorious position women have in their helping role. In the context of Gen. 2:20, "fit/suitable" means *appropriate* or *adequate* rather than "equal."

3. HEADSHIP AND AUTHORITY

Feminist View: A prominent, feminist theologian bears this witness: "I believe in male headship unabashedly and unreservedly. I cannot evade the issue or rationalize my way around it. The headship of husbands is clearly and unassailably taught in the New Testament. Moreover, the Bible clearly declares that the response of wives to their husbands' headship is submission in everything. Indeed, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. As the church is subject to Christ, so wives must be subject in everything to their husbands (Eph. 5:23-24). This precept is not given in Scripture as a recommendation, a suggestion or a piece of advice that may be optionally followed. It is an absolute mandate that requires the same level of adherence as any of its commandments."²⁷

That sounds great! But what does the author mean by such language? For instance, what does he mean by *head* in the context of Eph. 5:22-23? He claims that the "headship of Christ is never over the church in the New Testament. Here [in Eph. 1:22-23], it is for the church. As *head*, Christ gives the church fullness. He provides for the church's growth. The function is not one of authority but of servant provider of what makes the church's growth possible"²⁸ Another writes, "Christ as the head nourishes his body as it grows up into him. Since the head is the *source of life*, when Paul writes that "*the head of every man is Christ*," he means that man lives in dependence upon Christ strengthened and sustained by him. So Christ also lives in dependence upon God and so also the wife also lives in dependence upon her husband."²⁹ The typical feminist claim is this: "*Kephale* [Gr. for *head*] doesn't mean *authority over*, it means *source*."³⁰ Another evangelical feminist translator claims that "head" is an idiom that "means 'source' (like the head of a river), or 'beginning' (as in...the beginning of the year). 'Head' in the Bible never means 'boss' as in our modern use of the term."³¹ The term "*head*, biblically defined, means exactly the opposite of what it means in the English language. *Head* is never given the meaning of authority, boss or leader... This meaning of *head* as source of life is verified in the... reference to Christ's headship in the New Testament. [1 Cor. 11:3]"³²

²⁷ Gilbert Bilezikian, "I Believe in Male Headship." www.cbeinternational.org

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Don Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1977), 64-65. Cited in Kenneth O. Gangel, "Biblical Feminism and Church Leadership," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (Jan 83) 56.

³⁰ Cunningham & Hamilton, "Why Not Women?"

³¹ "What's a Marriage For?" The unnamed author "is a licensed minister and is currently serving as a Bible translator with Evangel Bible Translators and works with Jews in the Caucasus Mountains. www.cbeinternational.org

³² Bilezikian, "I Believe in Male Headship."

Biblical View: The word “head” should be defined in many different ways (including “source”) depending on the context in which the term is used. However, in normal language use, no one in a non-leadership position is ever referred to as “head” in relation to others. In contrast to feminist claims, the traditional view is that *kephale*, translated “head” in such contexts, signifies “leader, one in authority.” One scholar has written, “I have looked up over 2,300 examples of the word ‘head’ (*kephale*) in ancient Greek. In these texts the word *kephale* is applied to many people in authority, but to none without governing authority... No one in a non-leadership position is called ‘head’— ever.”³³ Later he wrote, “Wherever one person is said to be the ‘head’ of another person (or persons), the person who is called the ‘head’ is always the one in authority.”³⁴ We have no reason to refute this. When inspired Scripture clearly declares that God “*put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church* (Eph. 1:22),” it is in the context of Christ’s exalted position “*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion... (1:21).*” It seems obvious to us that His God-given headship refers not to *source* but to His God-given *authority* over all things (Matt. 28:18). That’s why we gladly submit to His sovereign Lordship and His headship over us. The feminist definition of *head* in these relational contexts is crucial to sustain their argument but forces them to make another related false assumption regarding the Trinity.

4. SUBORDINATION IN THE TRINITY

Feminist View: A prominent feminist writes, “If we define head as ‘authority over,’ then 1 Corinthians 11:3 can mean that there is a dominant to subordinate hierarchy within the Trinity, a position that does violence to the equality of the Persons of the Godhead. Early in its history, orthodox Christianity took a firm stand against any teaching that would make Christ a subordinate figure. To say that God is somehow authoritative over Christ erodes the Savior’s full divinity and puts a Christian on dangerous theological ground.”³⁵ It is also claimed, “What is modeled for us in the Godhead between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? Equality. There is no hierarchy in the Trinity, only absolute equality”³⁶ “The heretics would argue that although the Son is of the same substance as the Father, He is under subjection.”³⁷ The charge of heresy no doubt comes from the fact that *subordinationism* has been defined by feminists as: “A doctrine which assigns an inferiority of being, status, or role to the Son or the Holy Spirit within the Trinity.”³⁸ Others, because of a perceived mutual dependency in the Father–Son relationship, have claimed that “the subordination of the Son to the Father must be balanced by the subordination of the Father to the Son.”³⁹ Many others seem to acknowledge the Son’s temporary subordination to the Father, but only during His incarnation. One such writer makes this claim: “Because there was no order of subordination

³³ Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning Of ‘Head’ In The Bible,” *JBMW*, Vol. 1:3 (June 1996)

³⁴ Grudem, “An Open Letter to Egalitarians,” *JBMW*, Vol. 3:1, (Mar. 1998).

³⁵ Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 193-94. Cited in Eric Peterman, “Galatians 3:28 and Evangelical Egalitarianism,” *Conservative Theological Journal [CTJ]* 5:16 (Dec. 2001) 269.

³⁶ Cunningham in Cunningham & Hamilton, “Why Not Women?” 43.

³⁷ Katherine Kroeger, “Appendix” in Gretchen G. Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 283. Cited in Peterman *CTJ* 5:16 (Dec. 2001), 269.

³⁸ Richard and Catherine Kroeger, “Subordinationism” *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), Kroegers and others refer to the “heresy of subordinationism.”

³⁹ Grenz and Kjesbo, *Women in the Church...* 4.

within the Trinity prior to the Second Person's incarnation, there will remain no such thing after its completion."⁴⁰

Biblical View: The traditional, orthodox, Trinitarian position of Church history is that the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) are co-equal in essence or nature as one God (Jn. 1:1; 10:30). Yet as three distinct persons, the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father in mission and role status/rank (Jn. 5:19; 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:27-28). (And the Holy Spirit is subordinate to both the Father and the Son). This was clearly settled at the Council of Nicea (AD 325) when the false Arian teaching that the Son is subordinate to the Father *in essence or nature* (as the highest of created beings) was identified as heresy. But the doctrine of eternal subordination of the Son to the Father *in mission and status* "was officially adopted as the orthodox position of the Church and has continued as the view of the historic church to this day."⁴¹ These things are of critical importance for at least three reasons: 1) "Take away equality of being and you no longer have the Son and Spirit as fully divine. Take away differences in role and you no longer have three distinct persons;"⁴² 2) Subordination in essence/nature would indicate *inferiority*, whereas subordination in role status does not. Being equal in essence to the Father, the Son is not inferior to the Father simply because He is subordinate to the Father, who is the "greater." (Jn. 14:28); 3) This complementary Trinitarian relationship is modeled in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:3) where Christ is the central focus. Christ's headship of man exemplifies man's headship of the woman. And Christ's subordinate role to the headship of God the Father exemplifies the woman's subordinate role to the headship of man.

The Son's agency in the Father's creation and redemption certainly implies subordination. Christ was/is the divine agent *through whom* all things were created and sustained (Jn.1:3, Col. 1:16-18)." There "*is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him*" (1 Cor. 8:6). In His subordinate but complementary role, the Son, as our Savior-Redeemer, *was sent* into the world by the Father (Jn. 3:17; 5:30; 7:28-29) to do the Father's will (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This was settled in eternity prior to the incarnation, and prior to even creation when God the Father chose us believers in Christ, His Son (Eph. 1:3-4) who was "*delivered up by the pre-determined plan and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23). It has been said that while maintaining His *essential equality* with the Father (Jn. 1:1; 10:30, 38; 14:9), the Son walked in *functional submission* to the will of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Heb. 10:9-10). His concern was/is always to do what pleases the Father (Jn. 8:29). Christ's "obedience" to His Father is a clear acknowledgment of His subordination to the Father (Rom. 5:19; Heb. 5:8; Phil. 2:8). Christ claimed that "*the Father is greater than I [in rank] ... as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do*" (Jn. 14:28-31). Although the Son claimed equality with the Father in *essence*, He never claimed equal *rank* with His Father. And even in the future when all things shall be subjected under the Son, then also the Son Himself will be subjected to Him (the Father) who subjected all things to Him (the Son) in order that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

5. "MUTUAL SUBMISSION" IN EPHESIANS 5:21

To support their faulty assumptions regarding male-female equality, feminists have also been forced to make further assumptions regarding the two key words used in Eph. 5:21.

Feminist View: Feminists generally understand this "key verse" (Eph. 5:21) to teach a

⁴⁰ Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping, Subordination in the Godhead," *JETS* 40-1 (March 1997) 60.

⁴¹ Stephen D. Kovach, "Egalitarians Revamp Doctrine Of The Trinity," *JBMW* 2:1 (Dec., 1996)

⁴² Ibid.

reciprocal type, “one another” relationship of *mutual submission*. They get this from the two-word Greek phrase translated literally as “submitting yourselves to one another.” The two words are forms of *hypotasso* (be subject to) and *allelous* (one another). Feminists generally take the first word to mean “mutual submission” while indicating that the second word “must mean ‘everyone to everyone’ (that is, that it must be ‘exhaustively reciprocal’), which means that it refers to something that every single person does to every single other person.”⁴³ They generally believe that at creation, when God made our first parents He gave them equal authority and dominion/rule over the earth (Gen. 1:28). But, whereas the “fall had made of Adam ruler over the woman (Gen. 3:16), Christ makes of husbands, servants to their wives in their relationship of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21).”⁴⁴ One missionary translator believes that we “should not define the terms, ‘head’ and ‘submit’ by our modern, western point of view, where status has been essentially removed from gender distinctions. This makes a difference.”⁴⁵ Indeed it does! For, in a letter she taught concerning Eph. 5:21, “You will find the word ‘submit’ in your bibles where I’ve written ‘coming together in unity;’ this is because in this context, the original word means ‘attach,’ ‘append’ or ‘connect’... Paul is saying that we are to become connected to one another; we are to come together as a congregation and care for one another.”⁴⁶ Then she claimed, “Here [in 5:22-24] Paul is comparing the connectedness of two distinct parties – the connectedness of a wife to her husband and the union of the congregation with her Messiah.”⁴⁷

Biblical View: It does not follow that just because *allelous* (one another) indicates that “everyone does something to everyone else” in some contexts that it must mean this in all other contexts. The word as used in Gal. 6:2 and 1 Cor. 11:33 certainly does not mean “everyone to everyone.”⁴⁸ The context determines this to be true. Closely associated with *hypotasso* in the context of Ephesians 5, *allelous* in 5:21 must indicate “some to others” and not “everyone to everyone.” Textual scholars are undoubtedly correct when declaring that there is no “text in ancient Greek literature where *hypotasso* (passive form) refers to a person or persons being ‘subject to’ another person, and where the idea of submission to that person’s authority is absent... *hypotasso* always implies a one-directional submission to someone in authority.”⁴⁹ This includes Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 5; and Eph. 5:22-24. This is true in all other relationships where this term is used in the New Testament including: the boy, Jesus to his parents (Lk. 2:51), demons to the disciples (Lk. 10:17), citizens to government authorities (Rom. 13:1,5; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13), the universe to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22), spirit beings to Christ, (1 Pet. 3:22), the church to Christ (Eph. 5:24), servants/slaves to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18), and Christians to God (Heb. 12:9; Jas. 4:7). In these relationships, authority is never reversed. Since *hypotasso* (submit) is so used in all such texts, it cannot mean “mutual submission” in Ephesians 5:21-24. The relationship between Christ and the church is the pattern for the relationship between husband and wife. And Christ and the church are not in a relationship of *mutual submission*. Eph. 5:21 is

⁴³ Grudem, “The Myth of Mutual Submission,” *JBMW*, Vol. 1:4, (Oct, 1996).

⁴⁴ Bilezikian, “I Believe in Male Headship.”

⁴⁵ “What’s a Marriage For?” www.cbeinternational.org

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Other examples include these: Matt. 24:10; Luke 2:15; 12:1; 24:32; Rev. 6:4 etc.

⁴⁹ W. Grudem, “An Open Letter to Egalitarians,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood [JBMW]*, Vol. 3:1, Mar. 1998.

rightly understood to mean, “being subject to one another (that is, some to others), in the fear of Christ.”⁵⁰ Since the wider context of Ephesians 5:21 also has to do with relationships, believer to believer, it may also be true that Paul meant that both husband and wife, as fellow believers were to be mutually submitted in a humble, loving relationship, each caring for the other. However, this does not negate the force of Scriptural commands regarding wives to husbands (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1).

6. INSPIRATION, INERRANCY AND AUTHORITY of SCRIPTURE

Feminist View: Some evangelical feminists accept the fact that there are clearly “Pauline texts supporting female subordination... [But they] have rejected the argument for female subordination as being incompatible with (a) the biblical narrative of Man’s creation, (b) the revelation which is given us in the life of Jesus, and (c) Paul’s fundamental statement of Christian liberty in the Epistle to the Galatians [particularly in 3:28].”⁵¹ These would generally agree that “there is no satisfying way to harmonize the Pauline argument for female subordination with the large Christian vision of which the great apostle to the Gentiles was himself the primary architect... It appears from the evidence that Paul himself sensed that his view of the man-woman relationship, inherited from Judaism, was not altogether congruous with the gospel he preached.”⁵² It is claimed that “Paul is not only basing his argument [for subordination of a wife to her husband] exclusively on the second creation narrative [Gen. 2:18-23, rather than the first, Gen. 1:27], but is assuming the traditional rabbinic understanding of that narrative whereby the order of their creation is made to yield the primacy of the man over the woman. Is this rabbinic understanding of Genesis 2:18f., correct? We do not think it is, for it is palpably inconsistent with the first creative narrative, with the life style of Jesus, and with the apostle’s own clear affirmation that in Christ there is no male and female (Gal. 3:28).”⁵³ In this context, the author wrote, “The narrative in Genesis 2:18-23 is commonly classified by scholars as a religious ‘myth’ or ‘saga’ in the sense that it clothes the truth about the origin of man and woman in poetic or parabolic form.”⁵⁴ Another has written concerning 1 Cor. 14:34-35, “This statement creates such a massive contradiction within the Epistle itself, it is so much out of character with Paul, it so blatantly revokes clear statements of egalitarian participation that a multitude of attempts have been made to resolve the scandal it provokes.”⁵⁵ His “solution is to say that Paul is only quoting a view of the Corinthians which he rejects.”⁵⁶ Then there are a few who, although they embrace a high view of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, have rejected a passage such as 1 Cor. 14:34-35 for textual critical reasons.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Grudem, “An Open Letter...” See author’s “The Myth of Mutual Submission,” *JBMW*, Vol. 1:4, (Oct, 1996).

⁵¹ Jewett, 119, 134. Cited in Harold Lindsell, *The Battle For The Bible*, (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan) 118.

⁵² Jewett, 112-13. Cited in House, *BSac* 136:541 (Jan 79), 48.

⁵³ Jewett, 119. Cited in Lindsell, 118.

⁵⁴ Jewett, 122. Cited in Lindsell, 118. Another so called “evangelical” feminist has written, “For Bible believers the problem is that the apostle Paul seems to contradict his own teachings and behavior concerning women, apparently because of inner conflicts between the rabbinical training he had received and the liberating insights of the gospel.” Virginia Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 96. Cited in House, “Paul, Women, and Contemporary Evangelical Feminism,” *BSac* 136:541 (Jan 79) 43. Mollenkott, an “evangelical” lesbian theologian, wrote the forward to Jewett’s book, *Man as Male and Female...*

⁵⁵ Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 145. Cited in John H. Fish III, “Women Speaking in the Church,” *Emmaus Journal* 1:3 (Winter 92), 225.

⁵⁶ Fish, “Women Speaking...” 224.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 221-24.

Biblical View: Both Genesis one and Genesis two are equally inspired and inerrant. Chapter two simply gives us added revelation to supplement chapter one. They are not contradictory statements. Gen. 2:18-23 is not to be “classified by scholars as a religious ‘myth’ or ‘saga.’” Paul’s writings in 1 Cor. 11 and Eph. 5 where he cites from the Gen. 2:18-23 passage are also inspired writings of one with apostolic authority. The Holy Spirit, Moses, Paul, and Peter were not mistaken. They said what they meant and meant what they said. Their words represent inerrant, inspired biblical truth having to do with faith and practice. It is unacceptable to conclude that Paul was *in error* because he was relying on *erroneous* rabbinic teaching on a biblical passage which represents myth, *not truth*. It is tragic when “evangelicals” take it upon themselves to decide what part of inspired Scripture is written in error and what part is inerrant. Textual-critical studies provide overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of verses such as 1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and other verses which support the complementarian view. We would agree with him who wrote, “All attempts to get rid of Paul’s teaching on headship (on grounds that it is mistaken, confusing, culture-bound or culture-specific) must be pronounced unsuccessful. It remains stubbornly there. It is rooted in divine revelation, not human opinion, and in divine creation, not human culture. In essence, therefore, it must be preserved as having permanent and universal authority.”⁵⁸

PART B – EVANGELICAL FEMINISM: HOME, CHURCH AND MISSIONS

1. FEMINISM AND THE HOME

Feminist View: The Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) claim, “The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility (1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Gen. 21:12). The husband’s function as ‘head’ (*kephale*) is to be understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).”⁵⁹ This is about the same as saying that wives “were to submit to their husbands in the same way that their husbands were to submit to their wives and all were to submit to one another in the Body of Christ.”⁶⁰ In other words, “in the concrete structures of life, women ought to be subordinate to men as the occasion demands. By the same token men ought to be subordinate to women as the occasion demands.”⁶¹

Biblical View: The unique relationship within the triune Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3) is a marvelous picture of God’s intended relationship for husband and wife. As the Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) are one God essentially equal in essence, dignity, importance and worth so the husband and wife, as created in God’s image, are equal in dignity, importance and worth. Even as the Son, though essentially equal to the Father, serves in a functionally different role, so the wife, though *essentially equal* to the husband, serves in a *functionally different* role. And as the son in His role is subordinate yet not inferior to the Father, so the wife in her role is subordinate yet not inferior to her husband. As the Son is honored in His role, so the wife is honored in hers. Subordination within the Trinity and in the home does *not* indicate inferiority. Of course, the headship-subordinate relationship in the Trinity is unique because it is built

⁵⁸ J. Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, (Old Tappan: Revell, 1990), 269-270. Cited in Robert L. Saucy, “Women’s Prohibition to Teach Men...,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37:1 (Mar. 1994) 80.

⁵⁹ CBE “statement on men, women and biblical equality” www.cbeinternational.org

⁶⁰ Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton. *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*. (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 162-65.

⁶¹ Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 131.

on an infinitely and mutually loving and perfect relationship between each member. And the relationship between the husband as head and the wife as subordinate in the Christian family is also unique because it is built on the foundation of a very special one-flesh unity and a mutually loving relationship, even though with human imperfections.

The Wife: God's Word makes it clear that wives are commanded to subject themselves⁶² to their own husbands as is fitting in the Lord (Col. 3:18). And why is this? Because "*the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body*" (Eph. 5:23). Since the Apostle Paul's argument indicates that headship of the husband (Eph. 5:23) is the *ground/basis* for the submission of the wife (Eph. 5:22), headship must naturally signify leadership and authority, not origin or source. Paul continues, "*But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their own husbands in everything*" (Eph. 5:22-24). Christ certainly does not subject Himself to the authority of the church. Therefore, neither the church's submission to Christ nor the wife's submission to her husband can be described as one of "mutual submission." Young wives are exhorted to love their husbands and children and "*to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands...*" And why is this? In order "*that the Word of God may not be dishonored*" (Titus 2:4-5). The wife is to "*see to it that she respect her husband*" (Eph. 5:33). The Apostle Peter wrote that *wives* were to subject themselves to their own husbands even if some are "*disobedient to the word*" (1 Pet. 3:1). He continues that wives' adornment should "*be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands*" (3:4-5), and "*in the same way/manner*" given in the preceding context. The context of 1 Pet. 3:1 has to do with obedient submission: first, of the governed to civil authorities (2:11-17); second, of the servants to their masters (2:18-20), followed by the example of Christ's submissive suffering (2:21-25) in obedience to the Father; and third, of the wives to their husbands (3:1-6). The context of submission here is thus similar to the context in Eph. 5:21-6:9. None of these relationships involve a reciprocal *mutual submission* as described by feminists.

Even though in a submissive role, wives rightfully take on many leadership roles in the home as desired or delegated by, and in harmonious fellowship with, their husbands. Wives, who are also mothers, share with their husbands an authoritarian leadership role in a hierarchical relationship as parents over their children. This is certainly implied when the Scripture commands children to obey their parents in the Lord because it is the right thing to do (Eph. 6:1-2). Scripture never speaks of a wife's headship over her husband. However, there may arise conditions, such as desertion, divorce, disease, or death of the husband, which would make it necessary for the wife to assume a *headship role* in managing the home. In such cases, the wife would be faced with enormous responsibility to exercise authoritarian leadership in many areas formerly carried by her husband. Normally, the wife will find rest and joy in *not* assuming authority/responsibility not meant for her to carry. And as a "helper suitable" for her husband she certainly should have the freedom, if not obligation, to share her opinions and feelings regarding the daily welfare of the family as she fulfills her role responsibilities as a submissive wife and mother.

The Husband: Because of a man's depravity, power and authority often serves to bring out

⁶² This phrase, "subject yourselves," is a good translation of the word, *hupotasesithe*. The verb, "subject," means "being in a position or in circumstances that place one under the power and authority of another or others." A good synonym, "submit," means "to yield or surrender (oneself) to the will or authority of another."

the worst in men. For this reason, some husbands have become domineering, oppressive, even abusive dictators in their own homes, giving little or no opportunity for free expression, in words and activities, in and outside the home, by other members of the family. Husbands need to recognize that submission in human relationships is not absolute. Only submission to God is absolute. For instance, a husband cannot, in God's will, force His wife to go against her conscience and commit sin (Acts 4:19-20). To avoid this tragic situation, husbands must remain humbly submitted to the Lord as their head (1 Cor. 11:3) and follow our Lord's teaching on servant leadership, both by His words (Matt. 20:25-28) and by His example (Jn. 13:2-17). God has given husbands clear revelation as to how our wives are to be lovingly and graciously respected, honored and treated. His commandment is, "*Husbands, love your wives...*" How and to what extent? Just "*as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*" (Eph. 5:25). What a profound example of self-sacrificing love! Paul continues, "*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies*" (5:28, 33). Husbands are to live with their wives "*in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life so [our] prayers may not be hindered*" (1 Pet. 3:7 NASB).

Biblical headship is the husband's divine calling to take primary responsibility for providing the loving, caring, Christlike leadership, security and protection for his wife and children. God holds the husband, as head of the wife, primarily and ultimately responsible for family decisions. The marriage relationship and family life is seriously marred when any husband fails to fulfill his God-ordained leadership role either 1) by default/cop-out through passivity or 2) by exercising the wrong kind of leadership style which intimidates his wife. God will hold the husband primarily accountable. A loving husband and a submissive wife are God's ideal partnership for home management. This will involve daily (if possible) fellowship, prayer, and dialogue.⁶³ God gives special gifts to women/wives to enable them to function effectively in their unique roles as singles, wives and mothers. Men and husbands must recognize this and give them freedom to exercise those gifts. Good leaders listen to, and learn from, those whom they lead. The wife (and children as they mature) in all probability would represent a good reservoir of varied wisdom for family life. In many areas the wife no doubt has insight and knowledge that her husband needs. In any healthy marriage, the husband continually *learns* from his loving submissive wife if he will only respectfully *listen* to her. And when any man/husband *learns* anything from a woman/wife, he has been *taught* by her. And that's a good thing — even as it was when David *learned* from Abigail's gracious *teaching* ministry (1 Sam. 25:32-35). Unilateral decision-making is not equivalent to good leadership. What would Jewish history have become if Mordecai had not obeyed Esther (Es. 4:17)?

2. FEMINISM AND THE CHURCH

As already indicated, secular feminism is increasingly impacting the church around the world. Pentecostal and Holiness denominations and churches ordained women for pastoral ministries quite early in the 20th century. In the USA the mainline denominations approved such ordination in this order: Methodist, 1956; Presbyterian (north), 1956; Presbyterian (south), 1964; Lutheran, 1970; Mennonite, 1973; Episcopal, 1976; Evangelical Covenant, 1976; Reformed, 1979, Christian Reformed, 1995.⁶⁴ The Southern Baptist (SBC) approved women's ordination

⁶³ Honest, open, loving dialogue between husband and wife is especially necessary for a happy, God-ordained, conjugal relationship. In this relationship both husbands and wives mutually share sexual rights and duties in a reciprocal manner (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

⁶⁴ Statistics cited in Wayne Grudem, "Is Evangelical Feminism the New Path to Liberalism?" *JBMW* 9:1 (Spring 2004)

in 1964, but in 1984 this decision was overturned when conservatives recaptured control of the SBC.⁶⁵ There are now thousands of women serving as pastors, elders, and deacons in churches around the world including the “evangelical” kind. It has been written that “*Feminists have caused a drought in male leadership in the Church*. There are more women than men in many seminaries. A survey by the Association of Theological Schools indicated that in all major Protestant seminaries and many smaller ones (including the institutions of Catholics, who exclude women from the priesthood) only 60 percent of the students are men.”⁶⁶ Statistics of one denomination, the PC(USA), show that by 2003 there were 4153 ordained women in “Pastoral Leadership.”⁶⁷ The trend from 1996 to 2001 indicates a *decrease* of 754 “Men as Pastors” but an *increase* of 361 “Women as Pastors.”⁶⁸ By April 2004, a table on “PCUSA Inquirers and Candidates” the women candidates outnumbered the men 717 to 607.⁶⁹ For some time many church denominations have *permitted* the ordination of women for top leadership positions in the church. And some now even *require* their ordination.⁷⁰ According to a 2018 report by The Christian Century, “women are half the total clergy ... in the United Church of Christ.”⁷¹ According to Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, associate professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, “Women’s ordination remains among the more dramatic changes in the history of the church.” “Her research found that there has not been a comprehensive report on U.S. women clergy for two decades. In that time, the percentage of women pastors in most mainline de-nominations has doubled or tripled.”⁷²

Feminist View: The CBE claim that both “men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority... that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions... [and that the] Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them.”⁷³ In other words, “sex distinctions are irrelevant in the church. Therefore, the practice of sex discrimination in the church is sinful.”⁷⁴ For these and other reasons they conclude that in “the church, spiritual gifts of women and men are to be recognized, developed and used in serving and teaching ministries at all levels of involvement: as small group leaders, counselors, facilitators, administrators, ushers, communion servers, and board members, and in pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and

35.

⁶⁵ Ibid. At the 1984 convention the denomination passed a resolution “that we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work *other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination*.”

⁶⁶ Dorothy Patterson “The Impact of Feminism on Church & State,” *CTJ* 3:9 (August 1999) 216. This statistic may only have reference to the USA.

⁶⁷ <http://www.pcusa.org/cps/statistics.htm>

⁶⁸ From table on “1996-2001 Ministers By Call in the PCUSA” <http://www.pcusa.org/cps/pdf/ministersbycall.pdf>

⁶⁹ From PCUSA “The Office for Preparation for Ministry” <http://www.pcusa.org/cps/pdf/inquirerscandidates.pdf>

⁷⁰ For example, the PCUSA *permitted* this practice for several years but now *require* the ordination of women. “In July 1997, the Episcopal General Convention... passed legislation *requiring* the ordination of female priests” after 21 years *permitting* bishops to ordain women. Steve Henderson, “Episcopalians Impose Mandate,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* Vol. 2:4 (Sept. 1997).

⁷¹ Christian Century staff. “Report details trends for U.S. women clergy.” <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/news/report-details-trends-us-women-clergy> (accessed Oct 28, 2021)

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ www.cbeinternational.org

⁷⁴ G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 128. Cited in Carl B. Hoch, “The Role of Women in the Church: A Survey of Current Approaches,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8:2 (Fall 87), 245.

worship.”⁷⁵

Feminists often refer to Esther, the queen (Es. 4:15-17; 7:1f) as well as prophetesses, Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Jud. 4:4), Huldah (2 Ki. 22:14) and Anna (Lk. 2:36) as examples of women with authority in leadership roles over God’s people, including men. Women were not only allowed to pray in church but to prophesy as well (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Cor. 11:5). Other New Testament examples have also been cited to support feminist arguments for female leadership in the church: [1] Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9). [2] Concerning Lydia (Acts 16:14), it is claimed that her “home apparently became the first ‘house church’ in Europe. [And that] She was no doubt the ‘leader’ of this young church [at Philippi] ... [3] Paul was not the only one who recognized women as leaders of house churches... [A] common-sense reading of this letter [2 John] points to churches led by women... [4] Priscilla and Aquila... great evangelists and church planters... [were left by Paul] in charge of the believers in Ephesus... [The fact that Priscilla’s name usually appears first] probably indicates that when Paul thought of them, he thought of her first, which may indicate that she was the stronger leader of the two. She was at very least Aquila’s equal... [5] Phoebe... is mentioned in Romans 16:1 as a ‘deacon’ in the church of Cenchrea [same as] ... Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphras, Timothy.”⁷⁶ [6] Some have concluded that 1 Tim. 3:11 is a reference to women deacons. [7] Some have also taught that Junias (Rom. 16:7) was an outstanding female apostle. Concerning such women co-workers, it is claimed that both male and female believers “were to honor these women as leaders and submit to their authority.”⁷⁷ Another feminist who recognizes that Jesus chose only men to serve as apostles suggests this reason: Perhaps Jesus “did not choose a woman to be among the twelve because of the many rock-hard cultural beliefs He was already coming up against.”⁷⁸

Biblical View: Obviously, God has marvelously worked in and through the lives of an untold number of women throughout history. The Holy Spirit has graciously given women gifts for a wide range of varied ministries. Christ and the apostles honored women by their actions and words. However, even women such as Esther and Abigail recognized and manifested their humble, submissive role to their husbands, both kings. Christ Himself deliberately chose only men, not women, as apostles. In fact, they were foundational pillars of “God’s household,” His church, with the God-man as its head (Eph. 2:19-20; 5:23). There is no real basis to assume that Junias (Rom. 16:7) was a female apostle simply because the name may be either feminine or masculine. “The form is probably a short form of the common [masc.] Junianus.”⁷⁹ Even if this person were a female, her being “outstanding (or notable) among the apostles” does not necessarily mean that she was an apostle. Andronicus and Junias were probably held in high esteem by the Apostles and were thus noteworthy among them.

Spiritually healthy church families/fellowships are composed of spiritually healthy families which are foundational social units. So, it makes sense that men should be responsible for the main leadership roles in churches as they are in families. Churches should be structured in a way that supports family structures. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he related the church structure to family structure when he wrote, “*I am writing these things to you...so that you may*

⁷⁵ CBE “statement on men, women and biblical equality” www.cbeinternational.org

⁷⁶ Alvera Mickelsen, “Did Paul Practice What We’re Told He Preached?” www.cbeinternational.org

⁷⁷ Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995) 86.

⁷⁸ Cunningham & Hamilton, “Why Not Women? ...,” 55.

⁷⁹ Hoch, (*GTJ* 8:2 (Fall 87), 247.

know how one ought to conduct himself in the *household* of God, which is the church of the living God.” (1Tim.3:14-15a). This is in the context of what he had already written concerning 1) women in the church (2:9-15) and 2) the qualifications for elders and deacons (3:1-14).

First, concerning women in the church, Paul makes it clear that women should learn in silence or quietness with all subjection/submission. But he neither permitted a woman to teach nor to have authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Why? Because Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, fell into transgression (2:13-14). This is consistent with what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth.

Women were to be silent/quiet in the churches, because they “*have not been permitted to speak, but to be in subjection just as also the law says. And if they desire to learn anything, they are to ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful [or improper] for a woman to speak in church*” (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Although we may not clearly grasp their meaning and significance, Paul’s written words are in fact “*the commandments of God*” (14:37) and cannot be ignored. In their context, these words no doubt apply at least to an assembly of a local church congregation (including men) where authoritative doctrinal teaching is done by one or more recognized male ministers.

Obviously, there are other situations in which women are not to be silent in teaching members of the Body of Christ. The Scripture at least implies that both men and women as parents are to diligently teach their children the Word of God (Deut. 6:7). Older women are exhorted to teach younger women, including the fact that the younger women should “*be subject to their own husbands so that God’s Word may not be blasphemed or dishonored*” (Titus 2:3-5). Apparently both Aquila and Priscilla (as his helper) took Apollos aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26).⁸⁰ Such ministries could be inside or outside of a home or other building where a church fellowship normally assembles. But there is no clear indication that any of these women either assumed a role of teaching men authoritatively or served as elders or deacons in a church fellowship. Even if Lydia’s home was graciously used as a house-church (which may have been the case), there is no indication that she herself was a leader/elder of such a church assembly. Nor is there any real evidence that John’s second letter supports churches lead by women.

Paul’s teaching concerning women praying and prophesying, but with their heads covered (1 Cor. 11:4-16) is rooted in his teaching on subordination of Christ to the headship of God, of men to Christ, and of woman to man (11:3). Some key questions among many are these: Were women actually permitted to pray and prophesy in a church? If so, how could they do so and still be silent/quiet (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12)? Did God intend for the head-covering requirement to be applied permanently and universally? Is it the *practice* or the *principle* for which it was done that should be maintained? In responding to these and related questions there are no doubt differences among us which this paper is not intended to resolve. Probably most evangelicals believe that 1 Cor. 11:5 implies that women both prayed and prophesied and that this was apparently acceptable at that time. Some have argued that “1 Corinthians 11:5 does not give permission for women to pray and prophesy in the church.”⁸¹ But is it clear when and where the praying and prophesying was being done?

⁸⁰ This is one of the texts where Aquila’s name *precedes* that of his wife. As a helper to assist Aquila in his role, Priscilla was not necessarily assuming or usurping any unwarranted authoritative teaching role over Apollos. That could only be determined by her attitude, which we know nothing about. This was obviously a personal ministry, not public.

⁸¹ See John H. Fish III, “Women Speaking in the Church,” *Emmaus Journal*, 1:3 (Winter 92), 251. Fish is a Brethren

If this was done in public assembly of the church it must have been permitted only if men were not present or if the “prophecy” being done was not an exercise of authoritative teaching of men (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). Some have taught that these verses do not conflict with 1 Cor. 14:34b-35 since they “refer to women wearing head coverings when praying or prophesying in non-church settings.”⁸² In any case, it was apparently done with some sort of veiling or head-covering, which indicated the headship-subordinate role distinctions between men and women. Where either a man to have his head covered or a woman to have her head uncovered would have brought shame or disgrace because that was the Middle East custom of the time. There is a “preponderance of evidence” that “points toward the public covering of women as a universal custom in the first century in both Jewish culture and Greco-Roman.”⁸³ This may be why the head-covering was the practice of the entire early church of that time (1 Cor. 11:16).

Should this head-covering custom and Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians be perpetuated among all people groups for all time including the present? Although many evangelical groups would answer in the affirmative,⁸⁴ most evangelicals do not. The latter generally believe that the *principle* for the display of dress distinctions to symbolize male-female role distinctions should be maintained rather than the actual *practice* of the head-covering, which obviously manifested the *principle* in the Greco-Roman culture of New Testament times. This is especially significant in any culture where the particular practice of female head-covering either makes no normal sense or may even be offensive by symbolizing something other than that for which the early church custom was intended. It is thought by most evangelicals that the head-covering requirement was based on the customs of the times and thus should not necessarily be imposed on all cultures for all time. However, the headship-submission relationship is rooted in God’s created order and should be considered permanent and universal.

Second, concerning the qualifications for elders and deacons, Paul indicates that any ordained office of *elder* or *deacon* should be a *man* who is the *husband* of one wife, and one who manages well his own household (1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 8, 12). And why is this? Because if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church or household of God (3:5, 15b)? It is taken for granted that men are heads of both households and churches. The word, *diakonos*, sometimes transliterated as “deacon,” is usually translated as “minister” or “servant” since he/she was one who simply “serves” (*diakoneo*) others. Phoebe served the Cenchrean believers as “a helper of many,” including Paul (Rom. 16:1-2). But there is no indication that she exercised an ordained leadership role over any, including Paul. Because of the context, it seems quite likely that the “women/wives” (1 Tim. 3:11) refer to the wives of deacons rather than to “deaconesses.”⁸⁵ To say that women serving as *ordained* or *appointed* deacons if the *ordination* or appointment included authoritarian leadership over men in the assembly is highly questionable. But if the *appointment* is simply a recognition of

scholar who believes that “both prayer and prophecy do involve the exercise of authority.” p. 251.

⁸² See Harold R. Holmyard III, “Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 154:616 (Oct 97) 472.

⁸³ David K. Lowery, 1 Corinthians, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 2:529.

⁸⁴ This would include most Brethren Assemblies.

⁸⁵ For a good study on 1 Tim. 3:11 see Alexander Strauch, “Women Deacons, Deacons’ Assistants, or Wives of Deacons?” *Emmaus Journal* 1:3 (Winter 92), 195-213. Strauch, a Brethren elder and scholar, argues for the conclusion that in this context *gunaikas* (better translated as “wives”) is a reference to “wives of deacons.”

a woman's spiritual gift of *helps in serving (diakaneo)* others, that would probably not only be proper but needful and helpful in the church fellowship.

3. FEMINISM AND MISSIONS

This paper has considered some of the Scripture that addresses the feminism issue as it relates to the home and the church. But do these biblical truths and principles have any application for parachurch groups including missions? If so, how, or to what extent, do they apply? All parachurch groups have had to face these basic questions. Clearly the biblical truths and principles do apply at least to some extent.

A foundational assumption: It is only reasonable that church planters model where possible these New Testament church principles. The following are a few examples which apply to feminism issues already discussed in this paper:

First, elders were the only leaders of local churches in the first century. Whenever serving *elders* of local churches are mentioned in Scripture, the terms for elders are always used in the plural. There is obvious safety in praying together and relying on unity/consensus of a plurality. Therefore, it is desirable that a *plurality of leadership* be appointed at different levels without any one-man, authoritarian "director" as such. Second, elders and deacons were selected not only for their recognized gifts and ministry, but for their spiritual qualifications which are clearly spelled out by the Apostle Paul (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-11). Therefore, it is prudent that leaders be selected not only for their gifts and ministries but for the same *spiritual qualifications* required for church elders and deacons. Third, the ministry of elders involved authoritative leadership over the flocks they served. This is obvious from the command given to those under their rule to "obey...and submit" to them (Heb. 13:17). However, this authoritative leadership was to be exercised as shepherd-leaders, not drivers, of the flocks under their care (Acts 20:28). The words and example of the Great Shepherd Himself clearly reveals the kind of humble, loving, *servant-leadership* He expected of church leaders, even those with apostolic authority (Mk. 10:42-45; Lk. 22:24-27; Jn. 13:4-16). For this reason, leadership teams in parachurch organizations should function primarily as *spiritual* leaders rather than merely *secular* leaders. They should lead in a manner consistent with the principles laid out by our Chief Shepherd, the one to whom all leaders are ultimately accountable. Four, *only men*, not women, were ordained to serve as elders and deacons in the early church. Both elders and deacons were to qualify as "husbands of one wife" who ruled their households well. Since women were not permitted to teach men authoritatively in the assembled church, how could they function effectively as elders? The principles of female subordination are founded on God's creation order even prior to the fall and exemplified throughout Biblical history.

CONCLUSION

Influenced by secular feminists of the world, evangelical feminists have been successful in bringing about some radical changes in Christian homes, churches, and parachurch groups. We should be deeply concerned about those changes which are inconsistent with the clear teaching of God's Word. Evangelical feminists tend to build their case largely on the faulty interpretation of one *cornerstone* verse (Gal. 3:28). This, in turn, necessitates building a foundation of several other faulty, unproved assumptions in attempt to harmonize all the other biblical texts having to do with male-female relationships. By using faulty hermeneutics and exegesis, along with some manipulation of the texts and/or a low view of inspiration they make an aggressive but futile attempt to "prove"

their case.⁸⁶ A good, general summary of views expressed in this paper is found in the 10-point “Rationale” of concerns and the 10-point “Affirmations” re: Scripture of “[The Danvers Declaration](#)” published in 1988 by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.⁸⁷

Though not discussed in this paper, secular feminism in our present world system has no doubt contributed to an increase in attacks on the basic, traditional foundations of society. This has contributed to an increase in the breakdown of family values and structure, juvenile delinquency and crime, and the acceptance and increase of divorce, abortions, unisex, lesbianism, homosexuality, and more recently same-sex marriage, etc. And sad to say, the minority of those so-called “evangelical feminists” who openly identify themselves as lesbians obviously contribute further to these social and spiritual problems. And so increasingly in recent years many churches and denominations, too, have been devastated by moral compromise, looseness, and decline. Let us be alert to the issues and remain diligent and faithful to the Scriptures on these matters.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

BOOKS:

- Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women, Equal Yet Different: A Brief Study of the Biblical Passages on Gender* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1999).
- Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church*, (Chicago: Moody, 1970).
- John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991).

ARTICLES:

- Alexander Strauch, “Women Deacons, Deacons’ Assistants, or Wives of Deacons?” *Emmaus Journal* 1:3 (Winter 92), 195-213. This is a good article adapted from his book, *The New Testament Deacon*, published by Lewis & Roth, P. O. Box 569, Littleton, Colorado. Strauch is a Brethren scholar.
- Duane Litfin, “Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136:543 (Jul 79), 258-271.
- H. Wayne House, “Paul, Women, and Contemporary Evangelical Feminism” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136:541 (Jan 79), 40-53. Also printed in *Grace Theological Journal*, Vol 5, (Jan-Mar 1979).
- Harold R. Holmyard III, “Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophecy in Church?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 154:616 (Oct 97) 472.
- Michael F. Stitzinger, “[Genesis 1-3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship](#),” *Grace Theological Journal* (GTJ) 2:1 (Spring 81) 23-44.
- Paul W. Felix, “[The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism](#),” *Masters Seminary Journal*

⁸⁶ For a much better picture of this understatement, see Paul W. Felix, “The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism,” *Masters Seminary Journal* (MSJ) 5:2 (Fall 94) 159-184.

⁸⁷ From the “Preface” of the first published volume of *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, *JBMW*, 1:1 (August 1995).

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- Peter R. Schemm, Jr, “Galatians 3:28 — Proof-text or Context?” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womenhood*, 8:1 (Spring 03) 23-30.
- R. Kent Hughes, “[Living Out God’s Order In The Church](#),” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10:1 (Spring 99), 101-111.