

# Charity, Clarity, and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ

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## **Two New Organizations: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood Christians for Biblical Equality**

The collection of essays in this book was undertaken as a project of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. The Council was formed in 1987 by concerned evangelical pastors, professors, and lay people. Its rationale, goals, and affirmations are contained in the *Danvers Statement* (Appendix 2), which was finalized in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December 1987. It was first made public in November 1988 in Wheaton, Illinois, and then published as an advertisement in *Christianity Today*, January 13, 1989. One of the purposes of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* is to provide the *Danvers Statement* with Biblically faithful and culturally informed support and elucidation.

Emerging independently and simultaneously with the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood has been an organization called Christians for Biblical Equality. It would be fair, we believe, to describe this group as theologically conservative, evangelical feminists. Its members are the primary persons we debate in this book. *Christianity Today* reported that, in 1987, women who had withdrawn from the Evangelical Women's Caucus (in disagreement with the apparent endorsement of lesbianism) formed the new organization. "The new group," wrote David Neff, "is a national chapter of Men, Women and God, International, an organization associated with John Stott's London Institute for Contemporary Christianity" (*Christianity Today*, October 16, 1987, p. 44).<sup>1</sup>

In July 1989 Christians for Biblical Equality unveiled their position paper entitled "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," a statement of twelve "Biblical Truths" and six points of "Application." A news release reported that "the declaration was drawn up by seven evangelical Biblical scholars—Gilbert Bilezikian of Wheaton College; Stanley R. Gundry of Zondervan Publishing; W. Ward Gasque, [then] of Regent College; Catherine Clark Kroeger of Hamilton College; Jo Anne Lyon of Asbury Seminary; Gretchen Gaeblein Hull, author of *Equal to Serve*; and Roger Nicole of Gordon-Conwell Seminary." The declaration was published as an advertisement in the April 9, 1990 issue of *Christianity Today*.

### Pursuing Charity and Clarity Together

We are sure that neither the CBMW nor CBE flatters itself by thinking that it speaks for evangelicalism, let alone for the church as a whole. We do not know whether history will attach any significance to our statements. But both groups are persuaded that something immense is at stake. It is not merely a minor intramural squabble. It has important implications for marriage, singleness, and ministry, and thus for all of life and mission. Yet we sense a kinship far closer with the founders of CBE than with those who seem to put their feminist commitments above Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

The church of Christ will survive and triumph without either the CBMW or CBE. We have no Messianic infatuations. But we do have a burden—in large measure the same burden. When John Stott expressed his support for Men, Women and God (the parent organization of CBE), he used guarded language that we would be happy to affirm. He said, “I am very glad to express my support of Men, Women and God in its aim to understand and obey God’s will for sexual roles today.” That is our goal too: “to understand and obey God’s will for sexual roles today.” He went on to say, “The authentic evangelical way is neither the conservatism which reasserts traditional positions without reflection, nor the radicalism which sacrifices all tradition to the spirit of modernity.”<sup>3</sup> Again we say a hearty Yes. The “reassertion of tradition *without reflection*” runs the grave risk of Jesus’ indictment in Mark 7:9, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!” (RSV; unless otherwise noted, all citations in this chapter are from RSV). We do not regard our book as a defense of tradition.

We hope this book represents a critical sifting of tradition, a rejection of all that is not Biblical, and a preserving of all that is. In profound ways we share a common passion with the members of CBE: a passion to be obedient to Biblical truth about manhood and womanhood; a passion to see men and women affirm the awesome reality of equal personhood in the image of God; a passion to see marriages whole and lasting and freeing and happy for both husband and wife; the passion to resist the moral collapse of our culture in all manner of tolerated abuses and additions and perversions; a passion to be a winsome countercultural outcropping of kingdom beauty and truth; a passion to equip all men and women for ministry according to their gifts, with none throwing life away in trivial pursuits; a passion to magnify Christ—crucified, risen and reigning—to a perishing society; and a passion to mobilize the whole church—men and women—to complete the great commission, penetrate all the unreached peoples of the world, and hasten the day of God.

But the heart-wrenching fact is that we have profoundly different interpretations of how God intends to fulfill this vision. We are thrilled that it is God Himself who will fulfill His plan for the church: “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose” (Isaiah 46:10). We take heart that, in spite of all our blind spots and bungling and disobedience, God *will* triumph in the earth: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27-28). Yet one of the groanings of this fallen age is controversy, and most painful of all, controversy with brothers and sisters in Christ. We resonate with the Apostle Paul—our joy would be full if we

could all be “of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2).

But for all his love of harmony and unity and peace, it is remarkable how many of Paul’s letters were written to correct fellow Christians. One thinks immediately of 1 Corinthians. It begins with Paul’s thanks (1:4) and ends with his love (16:24). But between those verses he labors to set the Corinthians straight in their thinking and behavior. For example, he addresses the danger of boasting in leaders (1:10-3:23), the limits of sexual freedom (5:1-8), the extent of true separation (5:9-13), the proper handling of lawsuits (6:1-8), the goodness of sexual relations in marriages (7:1-16), the nature of Christian freedom (8:1-13), the proper demeanor for men and women in worship (11:2-16), how to behave at the Lord’s supper (11:17-34), the use of spiritual gifts (12-14), and the nature and the reality of the resurrection (15).

The assumption of the entire New Testament is that we should strive for peace by striving to come to agreement in the truth. Peace and unity in the body of Christ are exceedingly precious. Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in *unity* (Psalm 133:1)! “Seek *peace* and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11). “Let us then pursue what makes for *peace* and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19). “The wisdom from above is first pure, then *peaceable*” (James 3:17). But it is first *pure*. Peace is not a first thing. It is derivative. It comes from hearty agreement in truth.

For example, Paul tells us to set our minds on what is *true*, and honorable, and just; and the God of *peace* will be with us (Philippians 4:8-9). Peace is a wonderful byproduct of heartfelt commitments to what is true and right. Hebrews speaks of the “*peaceful* fruit of *righteousness*” (12:11). Paul tells Timothy to “aim at *righteousness* . . . and *peace*” (2 Timothy 2:22). The unity we strive for in the church is a unity in knowledge and truth. We grow up into the one body “joined and knit together” as we “attain to the *unity* of the faith and of the *knowledge of the Son of God*” (Ephesians 4:13, 16). “Grace and *peace*” are multiplied to us “in the *knowledge* of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2). And paradoxically, the weaponry with which we wage war for “the gospel of *peace*” begins with the belt of *truth* (Ephesians 6:14-15) and ends with the sword of the Spirit, the *Word of God* (6:17).

The reason for this is that truth frees us from the control of Satan, the great deceiver and destroyer of unity: “you will know the *truth*, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32; cf. 2 Timothy 2:24-26). Truth serves love, the bond of perfection. Paul prays for the Philippians that their “love [may] abound more and more, with *knowledge and all discernment*” (Philippians 1:9). Truth sanctifies, and so yields the righteousness whose fruit is peace: “Sanctify them in the *truth*; thy word is *truth*” (John 17:17; cf. 2 Peter 1:3, 5, 12).

For the sake of unity and peace, therefore, Paul labors to set the churches straight on numerous issues—including quite a few that do not in themselves involve heresy. He does not exclude controversy from his pastoral writing. And he does not limit his engagement in controversy to first-order doctrines, where heresy threatens. He is like a parent to his churches. Parents do not correct and discipline their children only for felonies. They long for their children to grow up into all the kindness and courtesy of mature adulthood. And since the fabric of truth is seamless, Paul knows that letting minor strands go on unravelling can eventually rend the whole garment.

Thus Paul teaches that elders serve the church, on the one hand, by caring for the church without being pugnacious (1 Timothy 3:3, 5), and, on the other hand, by rebuking and correcting false teaching. "He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9; cf. 1:13; 2:15; 1 Timothy 5:20). This is one of the main reasons we have the Scriptures: they are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The point is this: We do not love controversy; we love peace. We love our brothers and sisters who belong to Christians for Biblical Equality. We long for a common mind for the cause of Christ. But we are bound by our conscience and by the Word of God, for this very cause, to try to persuade the church that the vision of manhood and womanhood presented in this book is true and beautiful. It is a precious gift of God to the church and to the world.

Our aim is to carry on the debate with clarity and charity. By charity we have in mind mainly the good will that avoids caricature and seeks to state others' views in ways they would approve. We renounce the aim to "win" by concealing or distorting the points of disagreement. By clarity we mean the use of language that expresses as fully as possible what we affirm and what we deny.

We live in a day of politicized discourse that puts no premium on clear assertions that let people know exactly where one stands. The reason is that clarity will always result in more criticism than ambiguity will, and vagueness will win more votes in a hostile atmosphere than forthrightness will. But we want nothing to do with that attitude. Jesus refused to converse with religious leaders who crafted their answers so as to conceal what they thought (Mark 11:33). Our aim (if not our achievement) is always to be like Paul when he said, "We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2).

### The Declaration on "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" by Christians

We believe we share these aims for clarity and charity with the members of Christians for Biblical Equality. For this very reason we are perplexed that their declaration, "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," is written in such a way as to be unclear about the very issues that divide us. All of the seven authors of this declaration disagree with the thesis of this book: that men alone are called by God to bear the primary teaching authority in the church as elders or pastors. Yet the declaration does not clearly deny this. Moreover, most of the CBE authors disagree with our vision of marriage that calls the husband (precisely because he is husband) to bear the responsibility of primary leadership in the home. Yet this, likewise, is not explicitly denied; rather, the declaration makes general affirmations that, for the most part, we too could make. Thus the declaration does not make plain the important, distinguishing contours of their position.

The *Dawvers Statement* (Appendix 2) is, we believe, more clear and distinct while not pressing for agreement on many specific applications. We do not regard this as a perfect or infallible document. Some things, no doubt, could be said better. Much less do we regard those of us who embrace the statement as

perfect embodiments of its vision of mature manhood and womanhood. The statement was not written as a creed to test Christian orthodoxy. But we do believe it is true and is, therefore, one helpful test for right thinking on this part of Biblical teaching.

Our effort at clarity can be seen in our using enough precision and distinctness that, to our knowledge, the authors of the CBE statement "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" would *not* be able to ascribe to our affirmations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 with the meaning each of these affirmations has in the context of this document. Therefore, the statement gives a clear option to the church and lets people know where we stand in distinction from others who disagree at crucial points. Our affirmations are worded to make plain what we deny as well as what we affirm about the crucial issues of headship in marriage and primary responsibility for leadership in the church.

We turn now to present the declaration of Christians for Biblical Equality along with our commentary.

### A Commentary on "Men, Women and Biblical Equality,"<sup>4</sup> a Declaration of Christians for Biblical Equality

In what follows, we will present, point-by-point, the text of "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," followed by our own comments on that text.

*The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption (Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, 5:1-2; 1 Cor 11:11-12; Gal 3:13, 28, 5:1).*

**Comment:** The difference in approach from the *Dawvers Statement* is signalled at the outset. We made an effort to come to terms with the *nature* and *extent* of our equality as men and women and to be explicit about it: "equal before God *as persons* but *distinct in their manhood and womanhood*." This is important because men and women are *not* equal in significant ways. Gregg Johnson, in Chapter 16, makes this plain from the physiological/neurological side. More importantly, in this day of increasing homosexual demands for marital rights, we need to say loudly and clearly that men are not equal with women personally or physically *as candidates for the spouses of men*. Men and women are *not* equal when they stand before a *man* as a possible marriage partner. (See Chapter 2, Question 41.) At that point, women have rights and privileges that men do not have, strictly on the basis of gender. We may speak, and should speak, of equal *worth*, even of the differences, but to speak of "full equality" in the context of this controversy with no clarifying explanation leaves the reader to wonder just how far the authors are willing to go. The nature and extent of our equality is at the heart of the controversy.

*The Bible teaches that God has revealed Himself in the totality of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God (Matt 5:18; John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted wholeistically [sic] and thematically. We also recognize the necessity of making a distinction between inspiration and interpretation: inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in*

harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture.

Comment: We rejoice in this strong affirmation of the divine inspiration of all the Bible. The aim to interpret the Bible “wholistically [sic] and thematically” and thus to apprehend revealed truth “in harmony with the totality of Scripture” is good. We would only alert the reader that the only way to find out what the totality of Scripture says is to interpret the smaller parts faithfully in their nearer context. This is called the hermeneutical circle: the parts determine the whole and the whole affects how we interpret the parts. Our concern is that any supposed “whole” or “theme” or “thrust” (like “the leveling of birth-based status differences”) should not be used to nullify the contribution of any other part of Scripture (which may teach that gender is ordained by God to be significant in some role differences).<sup>6</sup>

#### Biblical Truths

##### Creation

1. *The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God's image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen 1:26-28).*

Comment: We agree. We would only point out that just as God meant for the shared responsibility of bearing children to involve very different roles (in the process of fertilization, gestation, and nursing) so also He may mean for the shared responsibility of dominion to involve different roles. Acting “jointly” does not mean acting identically, and “sharing” responsibilities does not mean that each must bear the same ones. Yet CBE makes no affirmation of any distinctive responsibilities that men or women have in bearing or rearing children or having dominion over the earth, and their statement could be taken to mean that men and women have identical responsibilities.

2. *The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word “helper” (ezer), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (e.g. 1 Sam 7:12; Ps 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.*

The phrase “full and equal” has the same ambiguity referred to in the first paragraph of the declaration—some will take it to mean a partnership of identical roles, and some will take it to mean a partnership of different roles with equal value.

It is true that God is called our “helper,” but the word itself says nothing about the kind of helper intended. The context must decide whether Eve is to “help” as a strong person who aids a weaker one, or as one who assists a loving leader. The context makes it very unlikely that “helper” should be read on the analogy of God's help, because in Genesis 2:19-20 Adam is caused to seek his “helper” first among the animals. But the animals will not do, because they are

not “fit for him.” So God makes woman “from man.” Now there is a being who is “fit for him,” sharing his human nature, equal to him in God-like personhood. She is infinitely different from an animal, and God highlights her value to man by showing how no animal can fill her role. Yet in passing through “helpful” animals to woman, God teaches us that the woman is a man's “helper” in the sense of a loyal and suitable assistant in the life of the garden. The problem with the CBE statement is the assumption that because a word has certain connotations in some places it must have them in every place.

With regard to the word *inferiority*, two comments: 1) the Bible never suggests that the differing roles of men and women imply differing worth; 2) women and men are inferior and superior to each other in various ways, but these are not made the sign of varying value as persons.

3. *The Bible teaches 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.*

Comment: We agree. But that is not all the Bible teaches about the meaning of taking woman from the side of man. It also teaches—and this is no contradiction of the other—that the man is the woman's “head” and that she should give evidence of her endorsement of his leadership (1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-10; see Chapter 5). If the CBE declaration aims to interpret the Scriptures holistically, why does the declaration omit this one place in the Bible outside Genesis where Genesis 2:21-22 is specifically used to teach on this issue?

4. *The Bible teaches that 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).*

Comment: We agree. But this neglects and obscures the way the Bible talks about the role of man and woman in the fall. The Bible shows the woman and man reversing roles so that she becomes the leading spokesman as they enter into sin (Genesis 3:1, 17). The Bible speaks of the woman being deceived and not the man, though this does not lessen his guilt (1 Timothy 2:13). The Bible portrays the man as primarily accountable for the fall: the Lord came to him first and not to the woman to call them to account (Genesis 3:9); and the New Testament pictures Adam, not Eve, as the representative head of fallen humanity (Romans 5:17-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). The specific thematic thrust of Scripture, which seems to give man peculiar responsibility, is ignored in the CBE statement.

5. *The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prescription of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.*

Comment: We agree with this point concerning Genesis 3:16. “He shall rule over you,” is not a prescription of what should be, but a description of what happens through sin where redemption is not overcoming the effects of the fall. But the silence at this point regarding the reality of Adam's loving leadership *before* the fall gives the impression that fallen “rulership” and God-ordained headship are lumped together and ruled out. Again the Biblical thrust is ignored: Paul never

appeals to the curse or the fall as an explanation for man's responsibility to lead; he always appeals to the acts of God before the fall (1 Corinthians 11:8-9; Ephesians 5:31-32; 1 Timothy 2:13). Why is this thrust and theme neglected when it bears exactly on the point at issue in this paragraph?

#### Redemption

6. *The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:26-28).*

Comment: We agree. But we affirm more specifically that what Jesus redeems from corruption is the beautiful order of creation in which the distinct complementary roles for man and woman were ordained by God's creative acts.

#### Community

7. *The Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on the men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells women and men, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor 12:7, 11, 14:31).*

Comment: Men and women are indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted to minister. But the texts do not say that the Holy Spirit takes no regard for gender. He is free to do so, if He wills. It would not limit His freedom in the least if, for example, He gave more women the gift of mercy (Romans 12:8). He apportions gifts to each "as he wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11; Hebrews 2:4). We need to make this plain because some may take this paragraph to mean that "pastor-teacher" (Ephesians 4:11) is a gift, and then say that the Holy Spirit is bound to be gender-blind in giving it. However, we agree that all the gifts (not offices) mentioned in the New Testament are given to men and women, though we do not know if the Spirit in His freedom sometimes takes gender into account when He gives them. (See Chapter 2, Question 34.)

8. *The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority (Acts 1:14, 18:6, 21:9; Rom 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15; see also Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2 Chron 34:22-28; Prov 31:30-31; Micah 6:4).*

Comment: We agree, unless "empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ" is a way of saying that a woman with the gift of teaching should exercise it toward the male half of the body of Christ the same way she does toward the female half. It is not easy to see what this paragraph might otherwise mean by ministering to the "whole Body of Christ." It would serve clarity better if CBE said plainly what is probably intended: God gifts women to teach men as well as to teach women in the body of Christ.

9. *The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev 1:6, 5:10). Therefore, the few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom of women must not be interpreted simplistically and in contradiction to the rest of Scripture, but their interpretation must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their total context (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15).*

Comment: Here the hermeneutical principle mentioned in the second paragraph of the declaration shows its power to silence Scripture. A broad and general statement about the priestly, royal, and prophetic function of women is used to determine what other texts "must not" mean.

Instead, what we recommend is that these so-called "isolated texts" be allowed to help define the nature of the prophetic, priestly, and royal role of men and women. But that possibility is obscured by caricaturing all alternatives to the CBE method. The problem here is that the language excludes the very possibility of our position by implying that any alternative to the CBE's method involves "simplistic" interpretation that "contradicts the rest of Scripture" and ignores the "total context" of passages to which we appeal. This is the fallacy of the excluded middle: one attempts to strengthen one's position by exposing the shortcomings of a weak alternative while giving the impression that there are no other alternatives but the weak one when in fact there are.<sup>7</sup>

But the alternative they reject is emphatically *not* the only alternative to their method. We offer interpretations of each of the texts in question that are *not* simplistic, do *not* ignore the Biblical context, and do *not* contradict the rest of Scripture. What is taken to be "the broader teaching of Scripture," namely, God's gender-indifference in assigning roles, proves on close examination to be a series of unwarranted inferences from many indecisive passages. This "broader teaching" then is used to govern the so-called isolated texts that were designed in the first place to help shape that "broader teaching" and guard us from the unwarranted inferences. This is not an approach to Scripture that secures the full authority of all that it has to say. (See note 57.)

Moreover it is unclear and misleading to speak of limiting a woman's "redemptive freedom" when the issue is whether she can "teach and have authority over men" (1 Timothy 2:12). "Limiting full redemptive freedom" is something none of us wants to do, because it sounds like we would be saying woman is not fully redeemed. That may be what the authors think we really are saying. But the problem is that many of their readers do not think that limiting the pastor to men means women are less redeemed. So the authors have avoided the clear statement of what is at issue (women pastors or elders) and used a term that wins more support ("redemptive freedom"), but probably at the cost of true understanding.

10. *The Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them (Matt 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).*

Comment: Again there is the fallacy of the excluded middle. What seems to be overlooked in the either/or of this paragraph is that leadership may exercise power not simply "over"—which may imply proud, self-aggrandizing domina-

tion—but “under” or “in front of” (that is, in the service of). What’s missing is the fully Biblical notion of exercising servant-power to empower. This is what Jesus did as a leader (Luke 9:1); it is what Paul did as an apostle (1 Corinthians 4:19-21; 2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10; Philemon 8-10); it is what church leaders “who govern well” are supposed to do for those they lead (cf. 1 Timothy 5:17 with 3:5); and it is what a husband is called to do for his wife as her head (Ephesians 5:25-26).

#### Family

11. *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 2:1-12). *The husband’s function as “head” (kephalē) 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).

Comment: This statement lacks the clarity needed in the church at this time. It does not say whether the husband’s “self-giving love and service” cancels out his role as a leader or simply describes the form his unique leadership should take. The result of this ambiguity is that people endorse this statement who have profoundly different views on one of the crucial issues at stake—the role relationship of husband and wife. How will it serve the cause of truth if CBE wins assent on this paragraph by omitting the assertion that really distinguishes their vision from ours? Omitted is the assertion, for example, that “mutual submission rules out hierarchical differences.”<sup>8</sup> We gladly and urgently call husbands to “self-giving love and service.” But we are persuaded that this does not cancel out the difference between *his* role and his wife’s—it rather defines the kind of initiative and responsibility that most wives are glad for their husbands to take. (For more reflection on the phrase “mutual submission,” see Chapter 2, questions 5 and 10.)

12. *The Bible teaches that both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in the nurture, training, discipline and teaching of their children* (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 6:6-9, 21:18-21, 27:16; Prov 1:8, 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20; 2 Tim 1:5; see also Luke 2:31).

Comment: We agree. But again the needed clarity is missing. Nothing is said about the point at issue: do fathers bear a distinct, primary responsibility in establishing a pattern of nurture and training and discipline in the home? We would say yes without denying anything of the partnership in parenting commended in this paragraph. Notice in Ephesians 6:1-4 how Paul moves from the shared honor of both parents to the special focus on fathers to take responsibility for their children’s training: “Children, obey your parents. . . . Fathers . . . bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (The same move from parents to fathers is found in Colossians 3:20-21).

#### Application Community

1. *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 involve-*

*ment: as small group leaders, counselors, facilitators, administrators, ushers, communion servers, and board members, and in pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and worship.*

*In so doing, the church will honor God as the source of spiritual gifts. The church will also fulfill God’s mandate of stewardship without the appalling loss to God’s kingdom that results when half of the church’s members are excluded from positions of responsibility.*

Comment: Again there is the fallacy of the excluded middle. The last sentence implies that if women are not given access to “teaching ministries at all levels” including “preaching,” then they are “excluded from positions of responsibility.” This is not true. All of the hundreds of ministries women rightly undertake carry responsibility, many of them very great responsibility. The *Danvers Statement* (Affirmation Nine) makes it plain that we want every Christian, man and woman, to be responsibly and significantly engaged in ministry. But we do not so elevate the office of elder or pastor as to imply that the thousands of other believers—men and women—who serve Christ in a thousand other ways do not have positions of responsibility.

The other problem in this paragraph is again the ambiguity concerning the precise point at issue: namely, may women rightly fill the role of pastor or elder? The paragraph focuses on the generally permissible *function* of “preaching” and “teaching” but does not say explicitly that women may teach Scripture to men or hold the office of preaching pastor or teaching elder. Thus again, because of this lack of clarity, people may endorse this statement who have significantly different views on one of the crucial issues at stake—a woman’s right to fill the role of preaching pastor or teaching elder. How is truth served in this crucial debate by formulating positions that win assent through ambiguity on the issues at the very heart of the debate?

2. *In the church, public recognition is to be given to both women and men who exercise ministries of service and leadership.*

*In so doing, the church will model the unity and harmony that should characterize the community of believers. In a world fractured by discrimination and segregation, the church will dissociate itself from worldly or pagan devices designed to make women feel inferior for being female. It will help prevent their departure from the church or their rejection of the Christian faith.*

Comment: No one can disagree with the aim to renounce “worldly and pagan devices designed to make women feel inferior.” But we wish there had been some clarity about who or what is being indicted here. Is our interpretation of Scripture being called a pagan device? Are we the ones who by “design” aim to make women feel “inferior”? If so it would help readers make reasoned decisions about this matter if CBE said: “The view that endorses only men in the pastoral office is a pagan device and is designed to make women feel inferior.” But again the language wins support without making clear what is being supported. We do not understand the rationale for such formulations in the present context of church controversy. It seems to us that we should all want to help our readers know as clearly as possible what is pagan and what is not, what is designed to make women feel inferior and what is not.

The desire to win the heart of contemporary women is tremendously important and praiseworthy. We share it. We too think the church should be a "city set on a hill that cannot be hid"—a beautifully attractive community of love and harmony and respect. But we caution that there will always be moral commitments in the church that are at first unattractive to the world. In one and the same context Jesus said two seemingly contradictory things: Men will "revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account," and, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:11, 16). Which is it? Will they speak evil of us, or will they glorify God? The answer is: both—sometimes one and sometimes the other, and sometimes one followed by the other (1 Peter 2:12). The point is that we cannot shape all our life so as to win approval from the world. Some of it we can. But in other parts of it, rejection by the world may not be owing to our failure. We affirm with CBE that we must always struggle to discover the right missionary balance.

#### Family

3. *In the Christian home, husband and wife are to defer to each other in seeking to fulfill each other's preferences, desires and aspirations. Neither spouse is to seek to dominate the other, but each is to act as servant of the other, in humility considering the other as better than oneself. In case of decisional deadlock, they should seek resolution through biblical methods of conflict resolution rather than by one spouse imposing a decision upon the other.*

*In so doing, husband and wife will help the Christian home stand against improper use of power and authority by spouses and will protect the home from wife and child abuse that sometimes tragically follows a hierarchical interpretation of the husband's "headship."*

Comment: We agree that in a good marriage spouses will try to outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10). Husbands and wives will often yield their own preferences to make each other happy. That is the way love is. "Through love be servants of one another" (Galatians 5:13). This is what husbands should use their leadership to cultivate. The responsibility of leadership that God calls a husband to bear is not conceived in terms of unilateral veto power. But the CBE statement does not make clear if they believe *any* unique leadership of the husband is good or if it is compatible with this kind of mutual kindness. This is another unfortunate ambiguity on a point that lies at the heart of the debate.

Again it seems to us that CBE is seeking to strengthen its case through the fallacy of the excluded middle. For example, CBE pictures, on the one hand, two humble spouses, each seeking to consider the other better than oneself; on the other hand, it pictures two spouses where one seeks "to dominate the other" and "impose a decision upon the other." In this way the CBE position is made to look like the only loving one, because the real middle position, the one we take, is excluded. We do not counsel any man to "dominate" his wife or to "impose" his decisions on her. We speak of a husband bearing the responsibility of servant-leadership and a wife gladly affirming that leadership. Moreover, we urge wives never to follow a husband's lead into sin. When we say that a husband should bear the responsibility to break a decisional deadlock, we do not mean that it will

be without much interaction with his wife, or that he will always break it according to his own preference. Responsibility to lead is not synonymous with getting your way.

To say that wife and child abuse "sometimes follows a hierarchical interpretation of the husband's headship" is no doubt true. But it also sometimes follows an egalitarian interpretation of headship. Neither of us intends to give any encouragement for abuse. But the outcome of our teachings may differ from what we intend, and this cuts both ways. We would encourage those who minimize the husband's unique role as leader to consider the possibility that this may in fact be cultivating a milieu of gender confusion that in the long run brings about more abuse.

For example, sons who grow up in homes where the father gives no clear model of caring, strong, courteous leadership distinct from the role of the mother will find it much harder to develop their natural masculine identity in positive ways and will be likely candidates for the folly of macho distortions of manhood that ruin many homes. (See Chapter 17.) In the years to come, will it be enough to tell husbands and wives to love each other, without helping them discover what is unique about manhood and womanhood in the dynamic of marriage? If all the emphasis is on gender neutrality and undifferentiated roles, how will sons learn the answer to the question: What does it mean to grow up to be a man and not a woman? And how will daughters learn to answer the question: What does it mean to grow up to be a woman and not a man? If these questions are regarded as anything less than utterly crucial, we think the resulting frustrations and confusions, through the loss of clear sexual identity in the generations to come, will erupt with a tidal wave of hostilities and perversions that we can now scarcely imagine.

4. *In the Christian home, spouses are to learn to share the responsibilities of leadership on the basis of gifts, expertise, and availability, with due regard for the partner most affected by the decision under consideration.*

*In so doing spouses will learn to respect their competencies and their complementarity. This will prevent one spouse from becoming the perennial loser, often forced to practice ingratiation or deceitful manipulation to protect self-esteem. By establishing their marriage on a partnership basis, the couple will protect it from joining the tide of dead or broken marriages resulting from marital inequities.*

Comment: It is astonishing to us that a Biblical vision for the inner workings of marriage can be proposed without reference to the deep and wonderful differences between male and female personhood. Another way to say it would be to ask: In a strictly competency-based pattern of leadership, where is the glorious parable of Christ and the church? What has become of the most beautiful marriage chapter in all the Bible, Ephesians 5:22-33? To us it seems not only naive but also sterile to portray the wonderful interweaving of manhood and womanhood in the fabric of marriage as the mere alignment of roles along lines of gender-neutral competencies, individual expertise, and schedule constraints. Something awesome is missing here. And its absence threatens the meaning of manhood and womanhood to such a degree that the church should be deeply concerned.

There is another way to protect spouses from being perennial losers. Let the

husband learn to lead as Christ leads. And let the wife learn to affirm that Christlike leadership the way the church affirms Christ's. Is Christ or the church ever a loser in this relationship? Is Christ or the church ever forced to "practice ingratiation or deceitful manipulation to protect self-esteem"? Has a husband ever been guilty in marital breakup because he accepted the unique responsibility to lead like Christ? It is a great puzzle to us why the CBE declaration portrays its competency-based, gender-neutral, egalitarian option over against the corruption and distortions of hierarchy while totally neglecting the beautiful portrait of marriage, visible today in many homes—namely, Christ and the church.

5. *In the Christian home, couples who share a lifestyle characterized by the freedom they find in Christ will do so without experiencing feelings of guilt or resorting to hypocrisy. They are freed to emerge from an unbiblical "traditionalism" and can rejoice in their mutual accountability in Christ.*

*In so doing, they will openly express their obedience to Scripture, will model an example for other couples in quest of freedom in Christ, and will stand against patterns of domination and inequality sometimes imposed upon church and family.*

Comment: If Christ, in leading the church, does not "dominate" the church, and if God, in being the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3), does not "dominate" Christ, and if elders "who lead well" (1 Timothy 5:17) need not "dominate" the flock, then domination is not the only alternative to the CBE gender-neutral conception of roles in marriage. There is a Biblical vision of warmth and respect and love that glorifies in the God-given, personal differences between manhood and womanhood. But in reading the CBE declaration one is left with the impression that the choice is between their view and "unbiblical 'traditionalism.'" We believe there is another choice. That is why we have written this book.

We believe that biblical equality as reflected in this document is true to Scripture.

We stand united in our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating Word that provides the most effective way for women and men to exercise the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit and thus to serve God.

Comment: See below for our summary assessment.

### An Assessment of "Men, Women and Biblical Equality"

Apart from our disagreeing with the (apparent) CBE endorsement of women as preaching pastors and teaching elders and with their lack of endorsement of a man's responsibility to give primary leadership in his home, our summary concerns are these:

1. The CBE statement says nothing positive concerning the special responsibilities that a person should bear by virtue of being a man or a woman. The silence of CBE on such implications for sexual differences is typical of egalitarians. It is one of the reasons why so many young people today are confused about what it means to be a man or a woman. Readers are only told how their sexual differences *don't* count. They are not told in what sense they *do* count. We believe that

the resulting confusion and frustration over male and female identity will be increasingly responsible for the precise negative effects that CBE aims to avert.

2. We lament the absence of clarity on key points of disagreement. Only occasionally must we disagree with the actual *wording* of the declaration, even though its authors hold significantly different views from ours. This is because some affirmations are accepted by all evangelicals and others are so ambiguous as to allow clouded agreement by people with deep divergences. In other words, the CBE statement does not offer a clear contrary alternative to the *Danvers Statement*. The controversial positions that distinguish CBE from CBMW do not receive crisp, clear expression. This is doubly troubling from our point of view, because we regard ambiguity of this kind as the common prelude to liberalism. The loss of clarity and precision can easily create a fog in which it is much harder to discern what ideas are really coming and going.

3. We are troubled by the repeated fallacy of the excluded middle: the strengthening of one's position by exposing the shortcomings of an ugly alternative while giving the impression that there are no other alternatives when in truth there are. The CBE statement is a strangely oblique and ambiguous document. Chauvinistic abuses to our right are deplored. Controversial egalitarian convictions to our left are implicitly suggested in non-controversial language. But we do not recognize our own position as either the one suggested or the one rejected.

Almost all the denunciations in the CBE declaration refer to relational abuses that we reject, too. Thus CBE distances itself most often from a corruption of Biblical complementarity that we do not share, so that the reader is left wondering what CBE really thinks about a position like ours that rejects those same corruptions. Some examples:

- The "rulership" of man over woman is rightly rejected by CBE as part of the curse, but there is no explicit denial of our affirmation that the *loving headship* of husbands is rooted in creation before the curse.
- The "improper use of power and authority by spouses" is rightly rejected, but there is no explicit reckoning with the *proper* use of authority in a husband's loving leadership in the home, which is at the heart of CBMW's vision.
- CBE says the husband's headship is to be carried out "as self-giving love and service." Yes, but no explicit denial is made of our affirmation that this is the *form* of a husband's leadership, not an *alternative* to it.

4. The CBE hermeneutical procedure seems to us to pit Scripture against Scripture, with the result that crucial portions of God's Word are not allowed to have their proper say. For example, they speak of "the broader teaching of Scripture" and "the totality of Scripture" and the need to interpret "wholistically [sic] and thematically." Having defined this "totality" in terms of equality and the leveling of gender-based role distinctions, they say that the key texts that we appeal to as decisive "must not be interpreted" in a way that jeopardizes what they have determined to be the totality. This is very precarious and seems in fact to muddle the most important passages on the issue at stake.

We do not claim to be above this very hermeneutical problem—determining the meaning of the parts by the whole, while at the same time defining the whole from the meaning of the parts. We all struggle here. And it is not just a problem in *Biblical* hermeneutics. Nevertheless we protest that CBE is heavily-handed in using the whole against the parts. And we appeal for the sake of 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:34-36; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19;



1 Peter 3:1-7; Titus 2:5, etc. that they be given their say in shaping the “totality of Scripture” instead of being treated like outsiders with no exegetical vote—especially when these are the very texts that speak most explicitly and directly to the questions of distinct roles for men and women. This is all the more crucial today because the temptation to conform the “totality of Scripture” to contemporary egalitarian culture is just as strong today as the temptation to hold on to hierarchical tradition. This means that, contrary to the assumptions of many, the very texts of which we are being told what they “must not” mean are needed in all their special focus to protect the “totality of Scripture” from cultural distortion.

Again we want to confess explicitly that *we* have the same need in *our* effort of interpretation. We too are vulnerable to cultural, traditional, and personal influences that may distort our sense of what the totality of Scripture is saying. Yet we hope that in this book we have given evidence of being shaped and guided by all the Scripture, not just some of it.

### Reasons for Hope

We not only want to pursue charity and cultivate clarity, but also to live in hope—hope that this controversy will move toward resolution in many fellowships and eventually in the church as a whole; hope that in the process we will become deeper and wiser and holier people; and hope that through it all our mission to a perishing world will not be hindered but advanced. What warrants are there for this hope? We see at least three. And, as with all signs of hope, these are also spurs to pray, because prophecies of this sort can be easily squandered. What will not be received by one generation God will save for the blessing of another.

1. There is hope because we stand together on the authority of God’s Word, the Bible. As agonizing as the impasse may feel, there is reason to believe that while this common ground prevails, new light may yet break forth upon us. The Word is living and active; it will pierce through all our confusion. It is not passive, but “at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It will not suffer itself indefinitely to bear our misuses. It will set us straight, or it will drive us off, or it will show us how to live in peace and fulfill our mission to the world in spite of everything. “The testimony of the Lord is sure, *making wise the simple* . . . the commandment of the Lord is pure, *enlightening the eyes*” (Psalm 19:7-8). “You will know the truth, and *the truth will make you free*” (John 8:32). One can bemoan the puzzling impasse of multiple interpretations, or one can rejoice over the precious and auspicious privilege of standing together on one solid foundation. No doubt we feel both from time to time. May our footing remain firm and our common joy increase.

2. There is hope because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Not only do we believe in the Holy Spirit, but also each of us is indwelt by Him, for we confess heartily, on both sides of this issue, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. And “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). He is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). He does not delight in disagreement among His people. He is urging and pressing us ever on toward “the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3). Therefore we may dare to hear the words of the apostle as if spoken just for us: “Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, *God will reveal that also to you*.” (Philippians 3:15). God is committed to correcting His people. He is not indifferent to dark-

ness. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching” (James 1:5). “His anointing teaches you about everything” (1 John 2:27).

One of His indispensable contributions in the task of interpretation is teachability and humility. The “natural person” without the Spirit of God senses that the things of the Spirit are foolish. Therefore he cannot grasp them, because there is no welcoming attitude or spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13-16). Where the heart is averse, the mind will avert the truth. We have a thousand ways to justify with our brains the biases of the soul. More than we would like to think, our reason is the unwitting servant of our wishes. This condition is the special concern of the Holy Spirit. He works from within, sovereignly opening and humbling us to the truth of the Word. The “spiritual person assesses all things.” Those who possess the Spirit eventually welcome the things of God. The template in the soul is cleansed of self and comes to feel the delight of meshing with its counterpart in the Word of truth.

There is a specific application of this truth to the issue of manhood and womanhood. It is something we all suspect to be the case but are often fearful of articulating lest we sound presumptuous. But it is so vital in this matter that we should not avoid it. Do we not find ourselves again and again baffled that others cannot simply “feel” the rightness of what we are saying about the relationship of men and women? On the other hand, repeatedly people will say (on one side or the other): “That surely rings bells in my heart.” Or: “That feels right to me.” Or: “I really resonate with that.” In fact, some have said to those of us speaking out in this controversy, “You’re wasting your time arguing about this, because it’s a matter of inner taste. Either you sense the vision as beautiful or you don’t, and no amount of arguing is going to make something look attractive to the eyes of the heart if it doesn’t see it in an instant.”

There is something very profound being spoken here. Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century preacher and theologian, developed it better than anyone we know. In describing how the saints are led by the Holy Spirit, he argues that, just as a good eye recognizes natural beauty, and a good ear knows harmony, and a good tongue tastes sweetness—all without a train of reasoning—so there is a spiritual sense in the regenerate soul that perceives immediately the fitness and beauty of a holy action or a relationship. Edwards puts it like this:

Thus a holy person is led by the Spirit, as he is instructed and led by his holy taste and disposition of heart; whereby, in the lively exercise of grace, he easily distinguishes good and evil, and knows at once what is a suitable, amiable behavior towards God, and towards man . . . and judges what is right, as it were, spontaneously, without a particular deduction, by any other arguments than the beauty that is seen, and goodness that is tasted.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Edwards explains, is why the simplest people are very often wiser and more holy than those who are very educated and scholarly. The ability to perceive what is morally good and beautiful is a function of a spiritual faculty, a discerning sense of fitness, a taste for what is lovely in the sight of God. Edwards sums up his discussion with the following sentence:

There is a *divine taste*, given and maintained by the Spirit of God, in the hearts of the saints, whereby they are . . . led and guided in discerning and distinguishing the true spiritual and holy beauty of actions; and that more easily, readily, and accurately, as they have more or less of the Spirit of God dwelling in them. And thus *the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God in their behavior in the world*.<sup>10</sup>

What this implies is that discerning the beauty and goodness of any vision of manhood and womanhood involves more than just rational exegetical argumentation. Each of us has some capacity for immediate, moral perception of what Edwards calls the amiableness or suitability of a pattern of behavior. He says that we will distinguish what is truly beautiful more “readily and accurately” as we have more or less of God’s Spirit dwelling in us.

If Edwards is right—and we believe he is—there is reason to hope that we may come together under a vision of manhood and womanhood, notwithstanding all our exegetical disagreements. For the business of the sovereign Holy Spirit is to lead His people (Romans 8:14). And if He leads as Edwards says He does—by giving a divine taste for what is morally beautiful—then none of us dare say, “The day cannot dawn when we will not be drawn to the beauty of a different vision.” Surely none is prepared to say that the influence of the Holy Spirit that we now have is all there is to have. Which of us needs more refinement in spiritual taste? God will make that plain in His time. More important than knowing that fact is the confession that each of us needs to be changed from one degree of glory to another. And if there were a great cry from us all, would God not answer—perhaps with a vision of manhood and womanhood none has yet seen or spoken?

3. Finally, there is reason to hope because the things that unite those of us on both sides of this issue are inexpressibly magnificent and infinitely valuable. This is why our mission to the world will not be blunted but will in fact prosper and triumph by the sovereign grace of God.

We serve the same omnipotent God, and there is none like Him. “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying ‘My counsel shall stand, and I shall accomplish all my purpose’” (Isaiah 46:10). The utter uniqueness of this omnipotent God that we serve together is not merely that He is sovereign and makes all His plans to stand. It is also the breathtaking truth that He works for us with His omnipotence! “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who *works for those who wait for him*” (Isaiah 64:4).

Do we not share the faith that the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it—that He made everything and everyone? Every human being is God’s by right, whether they are in rebellion against Him or allegiance to Him. He is King over the nations.

Do we not share the faith that in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, Jesus Christ, whom He appointed the heir of all things and through whom He made the world? Do we not believe together that Jesus reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by the Word of His power? We believe that this great and glorious Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us. He was tempted but never sinned. He taught like no one

else ever taught, and loved like no one else ever loved. He said He came to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. He suffered indescribable shame and pain, and died willingly. He identified the meaning of His own blood in advance: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

Do we not share the faith that Jesus rose from the dead never to die again, that Satan was defeated, that death was conquered, and that Jesus now reigns at the right hand of the Majesty on high until He puts all His enemies under His feet?

Do we not share the faith that anyone and everyone who turns from sin and calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved? Every believer is delivered from the kingdom of darkness, the fear of death, and the dominion of sin. Every believer receives the gift of forgiveness, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the cleansing of conscience, and the hope of everlasting joy in the presence of God.

Do we not share the faith that God has a heart and a plan for all the nations? He has other sheep that are not of this fold. And the great assurance of our lives is that *these He must bring also*. His mission cannot fail, for He is God. What His Son has purchased He *will* possess. And He has purchased people from every tribe and tongue and nation. Therefore the gospel of the kingdom *will* be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. The Son of Man will appear on the clouds with power and great glory. He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Every knee, in all the universe, will bow before Jesus Christ. He will establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace. All that is evil will be cast into outer darkness. And the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

These things and many more we cherish in common. There is no such thing as Christian fellowship if the shared reveling in these things is not fellowship. This is our united front of love and witness to the world. This is an unblunted point of unified penetration. Indeed, the mission is far advanced, and is moving today at an incredible pace.

In 1900 there were fewer than 10 million Protestants in sub-Saharan Africa. By the year 2000 there will be over 400 million—a growth rate 500 percent faster than the population growth. In 1900 there were only about 50,000 Protestants in Latin America. By the year 2000 there will be over 100 million—a growth rate 20,000 percent faster than the population growth. Just over one hundred years ago there were no Christian churches in Korea. Today there are 6,000 churches in the city of Seoul alone. More Muslims have become Christians in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran, and East Africa in the last ten years than in the last ten centuries. Christianity is the most extensive and universal religion in history. There are churches in every country in the world.

The task remaining is great. But we are gaining steadily. The goal is to reach every people group with the gospel and plant the church among them. Several thousand groups remain to be reached. But the number is shrinking steadily, and the number of Christians available to complete the job is growing. The great new reality in missions today is the emergence of non-Western missionaries and agencies. There are over 30,000 personnel and by the end of the century that number will be over 100,000 at the present rate of advance. Not only that, but also, lands once thought to be utterly inaccessible have opened, as it were, overnight under the sovereign hand of God. And as if that were not enough, God is reversing mis-

sions and bringing many of the unreached peoples to our own Western cities. In Toronto, Canada, live an estimated 67,000 Chinese Buddhists, 297,000 Indo-Pakistanis, 88,000 Portuguese, and 109,000 Japanese.

The point is this: there is great cause for hope today. Controversies notwithstanding—or perhaps through the very controversies themselves—Christ *will* build His church. All the families of the earth *will* be blessed. The nations may rage and the kingdoms totter, but God utters His voice and the earth melts. The victory will not come without suffering. Perhaps this is what will bind us together most sweetly in the end. May the Lord give us more light and more love as we hope in Him.

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## APPENDICES

## TOWARD RECONCILIATION

*Healing the Schism*

Alice P. Mathews

**R**econciliation is a term very much in vogue these days. In our litigious society, costly and destructive lawsuits have come to characterize the way even Christians handle differences. Yet the Bible shows us a better way.<sup>1</sup> Reconciliation is the Christian alternative for handling disputes between two parties who find themselves positioned against each other.<sup>2</sup>

Several decades of acrimonious labeling and infighting among conservative Christians over the place of women in the church and the home have led to what appears to be a hopeless chasm of difference between those who advocate gender equality and those who maintain hierarchical structures for male and female relationships. Can those who hold such opposing views be reconciled?

*A Real and Significant Difference*

If there is to be reconciliation, it must begin with the realization that the chasm between the two sides is real and significant. We must see and respect this conflict for what it is: a struggle for truth. No one in that struggle can dismiss opponents merely by labeling them—whether as power-hungry defenders of the status quo or as pawns of contemporary culture who are willing to compromise Scripture for the sake of a social agenda. Truth is on the line for God-fearing Christians on both

<sup>1</sup>This is the heart of 1 Corinthians, especially 6:1-11. It is also integral to our worship. In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus regards reconciliation with any Christian who has something against us as essential before we can carry out our acts of worship to God.

<sup>2</sup>Resources for those who seek legal reconciliation include the Association of Christian Conciliation Services and the Christian Legal Society (PO Box 1492, Marnfield, VA 22116). See also Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991).

sides of the chasm. When we fail to respect those who hold views that call our own beliefs into question, we miss the valid and ongoing struggle for truth. But in the effort to respect those with whom we disagree, we are faced with the painful necessity of doing so without abandoning this struggle.

This, of course, is not the first time in the history of the church that contrary understandings of biblical truth have faced the people of God. The great councils in the early centuries remind us that God-fearing Christians disagreed vigorously and often separated over core issues.<sup>3</sup> Later, in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther opposed certain teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, launching the Reformation when he nailed his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg door. Out of that act more than a hundred years of military warfare between Catholics and Protestants erupted in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, conservative Christians were divided over the issue of slavery, some using Scripture to defend the practice of owning other human beings and others using it to abolish that practice. Willard Swartley has helped us understand the ways the Bible has been used by groups opposing each other on this issue as well as on others, such as war and peace, sabbath keeping, and the subject of this book—the relationship between men and women in the home and the church.<sup>5</sup>

Even as we write in the twenty-first century, deep chasms exist between those who hold to an "open theism" and those who oppose it, and between those who believe all of the gifts of the Spirit should be operative in the church today and those who see some of those gifts as having been given to Christians in the first century only. All of this is to say that the church is no stranger to fracturing divisions in the name of truth.

Puzzled by the meaning or necessity of these fissures, we may ask why "the other

<sup>3</sup>Most twenty-first-century Christians assume that the church was clear about the nature of Christ from its earliest days. But it took the Council of Nicaea in 325 to formalize the church's understanding of Christ's divine nature (that God and Christ are of the same essence) and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 to formalize the understanding of the relation between the divine and human natures of Christ (one person in two natures). Long and bitter infighting over these doctrines led to permanent schisms in the church.

<sup>4</sup>After Luther's bold move and the quick formation of crowds of protesting followers around him, the Roman Catholic Church called the Council of Trent (1545, 1563) to deal with this new threat to its hegemony. Numerous wars based on this religious conflict broke out as Catholic governments tried to stop the spread of Protestantism in their countries: civil war in France (1562-1598), rebellion in the Netherlands (1565-1648), war between Spain and England (1585-1604) and the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648).

<sup>5</sup>Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald, 1983).

side" cannot see what appear to us to be the *real* issues. Thomas Kuhn, examining the structure of scientific revolutions, concluded:

The proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds. . . . [They] see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. Again, that is not to say that they can see anything they please. Both are looking at the world, and what they look at has not changed. But in some areas they see different things, and they see them in different relations one to the other. That is why a law that cannot even be demonstrated to one group of scientists may occasionally seem intuitively obvious to another.<sup>6</sup>

The extensive literature supporting male leadership and gender equality presents us with such competing paradigms.

Historian Anne Firor Scott, looking at the omission of women's accomplishments by earlier historians, reported:

It is a truism, yet one easy to forget, that people see most easily things they are prepared to see and overlook those they do not expect to encounter. . . . Because our minds are clouded, we do not see things that are before our eyes. What clouds our minds is, of course, the culture that at any time teaches us what to see and what not to see.<sup>7</sup>

Our culture grinds the lens through which we look at all we see.

We may ask ourselves how people reading the same Scripture, and taking it as inspired and authoritative, can hold positions or paradigms as diverse as those resented by male-leadership and gender-equality views today. Or, to borrow Kuhn's words, we wonder why a position that cannot even be demonstrated to one group of sincere Christians seems intuitively obvious to another group of equally sincere Christians.

What is true for scientists and historians can also be true for theologians and biblical scholars. David Scholer puts his finger on a central problem for scholars in his discussion of starting points and the balance of texts. *The biblical text one chooses for one's starting point in the study of a doctrine or issue in Scripture becomes the lens through which one looks at all other texts.*<sup>8</sup> If, for example, an interpreter chooses I Timothy 2:12 as the

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 150.

<sup>7</sup>Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71, no. 1 (June 1984): 7, 19.

<sup>8</sup>David Scholer, "I Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 193-219.

starting point, then other texts will be evaluated and interpreted (consciously or unconsciously) in the light of Paul's restrictive statement. On the other hand, if Galatians 3:28 is chosen as the starting point, texts such as I Timothy 2:12 will be read with Paul's declaration of "no distinctions" in mind.

If the starting text sets the boundaries or limits for what one is able to see in other texts, then the issue is more hermeneutical than exegetical. What, then, determines which texts are to function as starting texts? Scholer suggests that "our theological traditions tend to select our 'windows' for us."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, our particular culture and subculture have ground the lens through which we look at the Bible. As a result, a commentary written by a hierarchicalist will emphasize female subordination to male leadership, focusing almost exclusively on texts that appear to support subordination. On the other hand, those advocating gender equality focus on texts that their evangelical opponents often consider irrelevant.

When both groups use the same texts, it is often with a way of "seeing" that supports opposing views. For example, in discussions of Genesis 2, Stephen Clark sees the male as central to the narrative and therefore as the "head,"<sup>10</sup> whereas Perry Yoder argues that woman is the climax of the narrative, giving her an equal or even more important role.<sup>11</sup> We see what our lenses allow us to see.

One of the myths of modernity, accepted by physical and social scientists alike, was logical positivism—the idea that the investigator of any phenomenon could come to the investigative task with objectivity, uninfluenced by personal or cultural values. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, researchers in the natural and social sciences have come to understand that the way they personally view their world affects how they frame their questions. Those questions, in turn, determine the direction of their research. In effect, their assumptive world sets the limits for what they can or cannot see.

<sup>9</sup>David Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 30, no. 4 (December 1987): 417.

<sup>10</sup>Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in the Light of Scriptures and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1980), p. 14. In this passage Clark cites three reasons that the partnership between man and woman should be understood as hierarchical: (1) "man is the center of the narrative," (2) "it is the man who is called 'Man' or 'human' and not the woman," and (3) man is created first, giving him as "firstborn" a natural precedence by birth. This synopsis of Clark is taken from Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*, p. 154.

<sup>11</sup>Perry Yoder, "Woman's Place in the Creation Accounts," in *Study Guide on Women*, ed. Herta Funk (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life, 1975), pp. 10-11. I am indebted to Swartley for the contrast in emphasis between Clark and Yoder (*Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*, p. 154).

nitive dissonance, we do violence to the integrity of our own mind and heart. And when we ignore or downplay serious differences in beliefs about propositional truth with someone who opposes us, we diminish or even nullify the worth of that person's mind and heart. As pompous old Polonius noted in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "To thine own self be true, and it follows as the day the night, thou canst not then be false to any man."

Truth can be a casualty when differences are trivialized in other ways as well. One means of trivializing real differences is to change nomenclature. For example, when the term *complementarian* was chosen to replace earlier designations of those who accept as biblical a hierarchical structure in male-female relationships, many people's perception of the debate changed. In defining their position, Piper and Grudem reject the terms *traditionalist* and *hierarchical*, arguing that *complementarian* is preferable because it "suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women."<sup>15</sup> This sounds like a significant change in the traditional position and, as such, a move toward reconciliation. But soon the reader discovers that the crux of the issue for "complementarians" is *difference* rather than equality and that "difference" refers primarily to an *inequality* in authority between women and men. The nomenclature misleads, and truth is trivialized.

As James Beck and Craig Blomberg note, "It is not clear that the idea of men and women playing complementary roles inherently suggests that certain roles are altogether prohibited for one gender. Some egalitarians have complained, rightly it seems, that their view can equally be described as complementarian," because they too reject unisex theories of gender development.<sup>16</sup>

The differences between opposing positions can also be trivialized by what Charles Long calls *significations*.<sup>17</sup> To signify is to name, and often by attaching pejorative names to movements or individuals, we can so color the perception of our opponents that it becomes impossible to carry on meaningful dialogue. For example, when an evangelical who supports gender equality is called a *feminist* without any further qualification (and sometimes in the tone and temper of an expletive), that naming confers a reality on the receiver that may not be true at all. It is a false

<sup>15</sup>Piper and Grudem, "Preface," *RBMW*, p. xiv.

<sup>16</sup>James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, "Introduction," *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). Long's book is particularly germane for any reader pursuing a deeper understanding of the racial epithets or "namings" that demean and divide.

Theologians, too, bring their assumptive world to the questions they ask. Those who have spent their lives in service to Jesus Christ bring theological assumptions from their early training that continue to determine what they can and cannot see. Moreover, they are convinced that their assumptions are grounded in Scripture. Yet the history of the church should serve as a cautionary tale about assumptions that in fact were based at times more in political or social realities than in the core teachings of Scripture.

Therefore we must step back and ask ourselves hard questions about our assumptions.<sup>12</sup> As John Piper and Wayne Grudem acknowledge, "We have a thousand ways to justify with our brains the biases of the soul."<sup>13</sup> This is a good reminder to all who are concerned about women's roles in the home and church.

At the same time, we cannot ignore our differences. If we are committed to truth as the controlling principle, we must accept the reality that ideas divide people. When we know that we are to love one another, yet we have strong differences over crucial issues, the resulting cognitive dissonance may tempt us to try to paper over the chasm that divides us from our brothers and sisters in Christ. This can be dangerous to our commitment to truth.

"Truth" is not merely the content of a series of discourses or arguments; it also includes being true to oneself and to what is true in the opponent.<sup>14</sup> When we discard what we have come to accept as propositionally true merely to lower our cog-

<sup>12</sup>Lewis Wirth, in his introduction to Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, comments that "the most important thing that we can know about a man [sic] is what he takes for granted, and the most elemental and important facts about a society are those that are seldom debated and generally regarded as settled" ([San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936], p. xxiii). More recently, Huston Smith expands on the importance of understanding our unexamined assumptions: "The dominant assumptions of an age color the thoughts, beliefs, expectations, and images of the men and women who live within it. Being always with us, these assumptions usually pass unnoticed—like the pair of glasses which, because they are so often on the wearer's nose, simply stop being observed. But this doesn't mean they have no effect. Ultimately, assumptions which underlie our outlook on life refract the world in ways that condition our art and our institutions: the kinds of homes we live in, our sense of right and wrong, our criteria of success, what we conceive our duty to be, what we think it means to be a man or woman, how we worship our God or whether, indeed, we have a God to worship" (Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-modern Mind*, 2nd ed. [Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989], pp. 3-4).

<sup>13</sup>John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "Charity, Clarity, and Hope," in *RBMW*, p. 419.

<sup>14</sup>Jesus referred to himself in John 14:6 as "the way and the truth and the life." Integral to living "the truth" in first-century Palestine was being true not only to propositional truth but to his *being* God incarnate. It was his refusal to shade the truth of his being that put him on a collision course with the religious leaders.

generalization that makes further discourse more difficult, if not impossible. It trivializes the issue by ignoring the actual content of the argument and removing the other person from inclusion in the conversation.

In a powerful essay on the abuse of language, German theologian Josef Pieper examines the purposes of human language and the words we use: "Word and language form the medium that sustains the common existence of the human spirit. . . . If the word becomes corrupted, human existence itself will not remain unaffected and untainted."<sup>18</sup> Because words convey reality, when we name or identify someone or something, we communicate a quality of reality to that person or thing.

But Pieper insists that a lie (outright or implied) can never be taken as true communication because "it withholds the other's share and portion of reality, to prevent his participation in reality."<sup>19</sup> It is a corruption of one's relationship to reality. A person who thus corrupts language can give fine speeches but is to a significant degree incapable of dialogue. This is a form of deceptive verbal artistry: superbly crafted, perfectly worded, brilliantly formulated, strikingly written, and at the same time false in its thrust and essence.<sup>20</sup> This is illustrated by a prominent Christian author who, in order to support her point, cites the first half of I Corinthians 7:4 ("The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband") while omitting the second half of the same verse ("In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife"). This is patently dishonest no matter how elegantly stated.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, she offers two lists of "biblical commands" to husbands and to wives, in which she mingles loosely reworded biblical statements with other statements that are not found in Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Our commitment to truth demands that we speak what is true and that we use language honestly. When we do this, we may discover that what we hold as true divides us from those who hold opposite views. If we are committed to truth as the controlling principle, then we must accept the reality that ideas can divide people.

This a genuine problem exists, and it is *our* problem. Jesus is clear in Matthew 5:23-24 that if we are in the family of God, we have an obligation before God to

<sup>18</sup> Josef Pieper, *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *The Mark of a Man* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> For example, she includes in the list of commands for wives the statement "Their role is to be receptive" (*ibid.*). By rephrasing quotations from Scripture in her own words, she implies that all of the statements have come from the Bible.

do all that we can to be reconciled to anyone in God's household who "has something against" us. Note that the text is not about our behavior when we have something against someone else. It is about our behavior when others have something against us. The problem belongs to all of us in the family of God, and it cannot be ignored.

Whether we are egalitarians or hierarchicalists, there are people who hold things against us. In the process of acting to defend their paradigm, people hurt other people within the body of Christ. In the pursuit of truth we demonstrate an un-Christian priority system when the idea becomes more important than the people holding that idea. We have only to scan the history of the church to discover how many paid dearly, often with their lives, as they found themselves caught in the crossfire of competing paradigms.

The chasm is real. Even more important, the way we often respond to it is a scandal to the church and a point of ridicule for the world. Jesus' prayer in John 17 shows us why this chasm is such a scandal. Crying out to the Father only hours before his trial and crucifixion, he prayed for the unity of all those who would follow him, then and in the ages to come, asking "that all of them may be one, . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (In 17:21).

Do we understand that our oneness with each other and our mission of evangelism in the world are inseparable? Jesus' prayer was not a spiritual abstraction. Our unity is not simply for its own sake or because it would be pleasant or nice. In a profound way in this prayer our Lord links our unity with the success of our mission in the world. As J. Ramsey Michaels notes, "The unity of Jesus' followers challenges the world to believe."<sup>23</sup> This puts the matter of our unity in a different light. Yet the chasm is there, often using up time and energy and frequently diverting our attention from the fundamental mission of the church.

### What Then Must Be Done?

We acknowledge that the chasm is real and that it comes from a struggle for truth. For these reasons we cannot trivialize it or water it down semantically. We attend to Jesus' prayer, and as his followers we acknowledge that the chasm often diverts us from the mission he gave us; moreover, it diverts unbelievers from taking our Lord seriously. What, then, must we do?

*First, we all must continue to explore honestly the competing paradigms, using the tools of biblical*

<sup>23</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, NIBC (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984), p. 299.

*theory, logic and courtesy.* All Christians defending or forwarding one of the competing paradigms face the temptation of devoting their time to shoring up their own arguments while giving little attention or respect to the arguments of their opponents. We must adamantly resist this temptation.

A paradigm is like a closed box. Inside it are all of the pieces that make it a compelling explanation for the way things are or ought to be. To the extent that we enclose ourselves within the box, we fail to see the anomalies to our paradigm. Anomalies are like rocks piling up against the outer sides of our box. Kuhn has shown that we experience a *paradigm shift* only when the cumulative weight of anomalies pressing on the sides of the paradigm box forces it to collapse. All the major scientific discoveries of past centuries came about not because scientists were looking for a new theory but because significant anomalies overwhelmed their reigning paradigms.

What are the anomalies pressing against the sides of the respective paradigms? This book explores the anomalies pressing against the sides of the male-leadership paradigm, just as the contributors to Piper and Grudem's *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* explored anomalies pressing against the sides of the gender-equality paradigm. Every paradigm has its anomalies.

Until we have explored the anomalies threatening both paradigms, we have not completed our task. This calls for the best efforts of our best scholars, as well as our best people working with women and men in the church and in the wider society. It means reviewing the biblical and theological studies to see what may still need to be explored. It involves listening to people in the pew and on the street. It includes hearing insights from the social sciences (historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and culture analysts). It means looking squarely at issues of abuse (sexual abuse, battering and the abuse of power in church and home). It means examining our own accommodations to the godless culture around us. When we thoroughly understand the anomalies as well as the paradigms, we can move to the next step.

*Second, we are obligated to explain the competing paradigms at many levels.* Just as educators develop textbooks adapted to the needs of various ages, audiences and educational levels, so must we develop tools that enable people at all levels to understand the issues at stake. What are the fundamental ideas in each of the paradigms? Where did these ideas come from? How long have they been with us? And most important, if we accept these ideas and adopt a particular paradigm as truth, what are the implications for the future?

Some would argue that such efforts have already been made. We can applaud the solid exegetical and hermeneutical work made available to wide audiences by biblical scholars and theologians. We are grateful for the Christian social scientists that have also helped us understand some of the implications of both paradigms for families and individuals in the home or church. But much remains to be done. As Kuhn observed, what is intuitively obvious to some is still opaque to others. How can we move beyond this impasse?

As the task of explaining the competing paradigms goes forward, the temptation is always to simplify issues to the point of being simplistic, to strip down the paradigms to such a point that the necessary nuancing of arguments disappears, resulting in a mere caricature of the paradigm. This happens, for example, when a young couple is frightened away from an egalitarian marriage by warnings of deadlock in decision making if one party (the husband) does not have the final word. Likewise it happens when a pastor warns that having a woman in a leadership role in the congregation starts that church down the slippery slope into a godless accommodation to the culture.

Proponents of either paradigm must understand both paradigms inside and out and know the anomalies pressing against the sides of each paradigm box. Then they must develop adequate, truthful, simple (but not simplistic) ways to communicate the paradigm to others to whom it is unfamiliar.

*Third, while the first two steps are being carried out, we must acknowledge the chasm between the paradigms and embrace as fellow believers those on the other side of the chasm.* We cannot ignore the existence of the chasm or minimize its significance with semantic games. If, in fact, our paradigm has emerged in a struggle to find the truth about men and women in the home and church, we are dishonest with ourselves (as well as with others) if we attempt to water down the points of disagreement. This places us in a state of cognitive dissonance.<sup>24</sup> We cannot pretend the differences do not exist. Yet our Lord calls us to unity. We are admonished to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

Leon Festinger, in his work with cognitive dissonance, concluded that when we experience this tension we typically do two things. We try to reduce the dissonance, and we "actively avoid situations and information that would likely increase the dissonance."<sup>25</sup> The issue of truth concerns not only the truth we embrace but also

<sup>24</sup>This term was coined by Leon Festinger to describe the frustration or disequilibrium we experience when we are faced with inconsistencies between what we believe to be true and what we experience. See Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1957), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*



our difficulty in living with the tension between truth and love. We actively avoid information and situations that increase the tension or dissonance between what we believe and what we experience in our lives.

Does this begin to explain how something that is intuitively obvious to one remains opaque to another? In view of this tendency, how can we maintain an awareness of the chasm between the two paradigms even as we embrace those whose ideas we reject?

### *The Gospel as the Basis of Our Relationship*

Again, we recall Jesus' prayer that we may be one "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (In 17:20-21). The unity for which he prayed in those last hours before dying on a Roman cross is not merely an agreement to sweep our differences under the carpet as if they did not matter. Nor is it a conformity that one group imposes on another in an effort to present an aura of unity. Jesus is clear about both the nature and the purpose of this unity. Just as the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, so are we to be one in them. Our unity is in God, and the power to hold truth in love for one another lies first in our relationship to God. Reconciliation begins here.

Only the gospel has the power to convert our dissonance into consonance. But how does the gospel work to overturn our natural inability to hold the truth in love? The doctrine of reconciliation is clearly stated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Thus reconciliation brings together in love and friendship those who have been enemies. God was in Christ reconciling us to himself, not counting our trespasses against us. Then he gave to us the evangelistic task of bringing other people into a relationship to himself through Jesus Christ. God knew the truth about us yet reached out to us in the atoning death of his Son to bring us into a relationship of love with him. God demonstrates how truth and love can coexist in our relationship to him. But can it coexist in our relationships to others with whom we disagree?

The pursuit of truth can never be a substitute for nurturing relationships within

the body of Christ. We are called to care for the brother or sister with whom we disagree while at the same time holding to the truth as we understand it. The tension between the two is inherent, and the resulting discomfort may persuade us that it is not merely difficult to achieve but it is morally wrong to marry the two. We think we cannot hold to the truth we have embraced while nurturing relationships with those with whom we disagree. Yet our Lord calls us to truth *and* to oneness in him. He does not tell us it is easy, but he is clear that it is necessary.

On the eve of Jesus' crucifixion "a dispute . . . arose among [the disciples] as to which of them was considered to be greatest" (Lk 22:24). Jesus intervened, reminding them that his followers should not use power or authority in the manner of the "kings of the Gentiles." That dispute seemed minor, but Jesus knew that the spirit behind the dispute was the serpent's poison. It had the potential to destroy the work of God in the world. He could not ignore it and thus responded with a solemn rebuke. Why? Their oneness was essential to their work in the world for God's kingdom.

Paul faced factions tearing apart the believers in Corinth (petty infighting, sexual immorality, believers taking other believers to court, issues of relationships in and out of marriage, legalisms about eating and drinking, abuses of relationships at the Lord's Table, flaunting of spiritual gifts, etc.)—many seemingly intractable issues. While he ruled on or counseled certain attitudes and behaviors in each of the problem areas, he repeatedly pointed the Corinthians to Jesus Christ. When we talk about reconciliation, this is the only point of true unity. We are to be one in Christ even as the Father and the Son are one (In 17:20-23).

Working with mathematical set theory, anthropologist and missiologist Paul Hiebert offers a means of imaging how Jesus' prayer for oneness is realized in human life.<sup>26</sup> In set theory, a "set" is a kind of worldview, a way to understand what is or ought to be true in life. If you imagine a set as a circle, it has a circumference (boundary) and a center (target or goal).

Some people have what Hiebert calls "bounded sets." They focus on the boundary of their set, its circumference. A person with a "bounded set" believes what is most important is to maintain the boundaries of truth. Bounded sets are fundamental to our understanding of order, and in a bounded set the definition of righteousness and justice is to live within the law (the boundary) but not nec-

<sup>26</sup>Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994); see chapter six on bounded sets.

essarily to live in harmony with each other.

A different kind of set is the "centered" or "relational" set. Here the focus is not on maintaining the boundaries but on the *relationship* of everyone and everything to the center—the target or goal. Some are far from the center but are moving toward it. That makes them part of the set. Others may be near the center but are moving away from it. Thus they are no longer seen as part of the set. The direction of movement toward or away from the center determines who is "in" and who is "out."

In "centered-set" thinking, more emphasis is placed on strengthening the relationship to the center than on maintaining the boundary. The boundary exists by virtue of the members' relationship to the center. Hiebert sees Hebrew culture as a centered set in which the people were in covenant relationship to God first, then to one another as they moved toward the center. The theological worldview of Jesus and Paul was also a centered set. How else could they envision and speak of all believers as forming one body?

We are one in Jesus Christ. Yes, we know the boundaries of our paradigms. But as Christians wrestling with issues of gender limits or liberties in the church, we know that the focus cannot be on boundaries. So we move from the image of a box (our own paradigm) to the image of a circle (a centered or relational set). Why? Because Jesus placed a priority on right relationships as absolutely integral to our mission in the world.

It is never easy to care deeply for the brother or sister with whom we disagree and at the same time to hold faithfully to the truth as we understand it. It can easily throw us into such cognitive dissonance that we either let go of the truth we have embraced or let go of any obligation for relationship with a disagreeing (and possibly disagreeable) brother or sister in Christ. It is a strange but hopeful reality, however, that we most often grow and develop spiritually as we live within the tensions of the Christian life.<sup>27</sup>

If we are serious about healing the real schism between hierarchicalists and egalitarians, we will refuse to sacrifice the mission of the church (endangered by our lack of unity) for the sake of the paradigm we embrace. But we will also refuse to sacrifice the truth we have embraced, because we believe it is God's truth for the welfare of his people. In the midst of the tension between the two, we will find a

<sup>27</sup>I am indebted to Old Testament professor John Worgul (Bethel Seminary of the East) who has helped me—and many of his students—come to grips with this paradoxical reality.

way to live within this tension as we stay focused on Christ, our Center. And we will discover that as we move toward him as Center, we move closer to others who are moving in the same direction. Even if we disagree about women's place in the home and church, we will at least be close enough to show love and care for those with a competing paradigm.

It is not a neat vision with a simple list of things to do that will guarantee unity. It has about it the raw and messy look of reality. But if the focus is on Christ, by his Spirit we can be one—and we will see things we had not seen before. We may even discover a completely different paradigm replacing both of the existing paradigms. But we can never make such discoveries as long as we insist on a bounded set with a focus on the boundaries. It becomes possible only when we are part of a centered set, with Christ and his kingdom as our priority, as we *all* move toward our Center.

There is an arrogance to which we are all liable. It is the arrogance of thinking that only we have the truth. God's truth may well be greater than all of our "truths." Until we come into that larger truth, we must be true to the truth we have embraced. But even as we embrace our paradigm, may God help us move toward an understanding of his true and perfect paradigm—which may well swallow up all earthly paradigms for the relationship of men and women in the church and home.