

# SYNERGOI

**For we are GOD'S Fellow Workers... (1 Cor 3:9)**

θεου' γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοὶ

**A LETTER FOR LEADERS**

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## **Headship – Introduction [Article #1]**

Last May the Canada East District Conference requested the National Constitutional Commission to bring some clarity to the issue of Biblical Headship. I have been working with Graham Burkhart in order to see some progress in coming to a good statement that will be as helpful and conciliatory as possible.

In the course of wrestling with the issue afresh, I have been going back to do some fresh study. I have also been coming to terms with some movement in my own views on the matter of women in ministry. I have tried to set out the balance as I see it in my previous article entitled, “Hands to Serve.” No doubt some will think that my pilgrimage has gone too far and some not far enough. Some will regret that I am attempting to articulate a position at all. My fear in doing so is that it will distract us all from the central task of getting the Great Commission done. There is so much to learn and to apply in doing the Great Commission. My hope is that the series of studies will stimulate some careful reflection and provide some useful background without drawing too much energy from the main thing!

It concerns me that the prevailing state of the question has devolved into a bipolar approach to this topic and that it has too often not allowed for alternative formulations. I am surprised at the anger that is sometimes vented. On the other hand, let me say that it is often the case that God’s people in practice demonstrate the spirit of Christ in ways that belie their articulations – in other words, God’s people often show more grace and balance than their theologies might suggest. For this I am extremely thankful, but how much better when our formal expressions align with and strengthen our manner of life. Thank you, Lord.

I have seen a very early draft of a Constitutional Commission’s position paper. It is too early to say much at all except that I appreciate the tone and the care with which it is being crafted. I can only hope that the result will be genuinely helpful in bringing peace on this topic.

Very few doctrines in biblical terms are a test of orthodoxy or of fellowship. Although the history of the church has been marred by dissensions and divisions for many reasons there has also been a cheering impulse toward unity that is based on essentials. The Scriptures are clear and the Creeds have been wise in their distillation of those essentials. The Christ at the Centre statement is our own attempt to bring clarity on this. It also offers guidance for dealing with non-essentials, that is those matters that are not to be tests of orthodoxy or of fellowship. Agreement on headship, desirable though it may be, is not among those essentials. Let the statement from “Christ at the Centre” guide our discussion, deliberation and decisions. Here is an excerpt from “Christ at the Centre”:

## **Liberty in Non-Essentials**

*We proclaim passionately the Gospel of Jesus. We uncompromisingly defend the Essentials. We gladly celebrate our liberty in non-essentials. We warmly commend charity in all things.*

*We accept that the Scriptures teach many other things of importance and substance beyond the Unifying Essentials. However, we are persuaded that these other matters must not displace our unity based on essentials. We will be careful that our studious attention to these matters, albeit worthy, not distract us from our high calling to make His Mission, Our Commission.*

*We can and will engage in teaching and dialogue in areas beyond our unifying base with “warm hearts and cool heads” rather than “hot heads and cold hearts.” We intend to generate light rather than heat. We will be careful that our passionate engagements on points of practice or teaching not bring disrepute to our Saviour by doing so in a way unbecoming.*

*We will represent the views of others fairly, accurately and irenically. Charity will guide our forms of expression and we agree that fair dealing concerning issues of known sensitivity is important to our unity.*

*We will treat sensitively the heritage positions of our movement and the traditions specific to each congregational culture.*

*We will express our well considered views and will plead for a particular understanding but not impugn the spirituality, character or intelligence of those who differ. We will speak of our fellows with respect and avoid the tendency to demonize others who hold differing views. When others are speaking we will accord them a courteous hearing, although we may hold differing views.*

*We will cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and kindness in speech and be slow to take offense and always ready for reconciliation.*

*We will foster an atmosphere where careful study of the Scriptures is preeminent, reasoned decision making is encouraged, passionate love for God is approved and active service is the result.*

*We will also seek to develop consensus on various issues and to develop mediating positions that build bridges rather than walls appreciating those points held in common. Position papers concerning such issues will be published from time to time.*

*We will guard against the tendency to make agreement on secondary issues tests of fellowship or service.*

*We intend to be a movement characterized by Unity in Essentials, Liberty in Non-Essentials and Charity in All Things.*

Let us make sure that the things that must be defended to the death, are firmly and clearly articulated. Let this be the castle we defend, with our lives if necessary. Let us also scout out the lay of the land around the castle as best we can, all the while recognizing that we cannot and ought not to defend this ground with our lives – to do so might in fact be a betrayal or a compromise of the essentials we hold dear.

Here are some things to anticipate in the coming days. I will be sending out a series of short articles (eight in all) on this topic (among other topics) with the intention of giving some attention to most of the crucial elements or passages. I hope that we can have a chat forum up and running by the end of January to further the conversation. Graham Burkhart has agreed to facilitate the e-forum once it is on-line. To be continued... God bless, Pastor Phil

*Pastor Phil*