

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 – My Approach [Article #2]

The issue of biblical headship (or, male headship) is the general topic under consideration. The issues of women in ministry and women's ordination are attendant themes. The key passages in subsequent articles that will be examined carefully if briefly will be 1 Cor 11; 14; Eph 5; 1 Tim 2. The key word study will be the word, "head."

The approach that I intend to take in consideration of this series is to seek out a "middle ground" inasmuch as possible. Any good debater knows that it is possible to advocate for nearly any proposition, either for or against. There is usually enough room on either side to allow the proponent to set forth a case.

I am much less interested in "winning" than being able to set out a case that with a bit of charity will allow God's people to live and work together for the advance of His Cause and Kingdom. I hold the conviction that there are very few "hills worth dying for" and this is not one of them. For those who think otherwise, I ask for your forbearance as I set out this material. I am hopeful that by the end of January that there will be an e-forum to allow for on-line discussion.

There is a great deal that has been written and said in this area. In order to prepare specifically for this series I have listened carefully and taken notes from the Regent College audio series done by Gordon Fee. Although I differ in many ways from Fee, I have found it helpful, thought provoking and in some cases partially convincing. I listened to this series because it was a resource used by many of our western pastors. I commend it to others for their study. I had thought to use William Webb's approach (Slaves, Women and Homosexuals) but although his book sets out the challenges of interpretation well, I have been less satisfied with his approach as I tried to apply it myself. I still think it is an important book to read! Also, I have done some fresh study of the relevant biblical texts but have not done an exhaustive study of all the material. I think that I have heard or read most of the positions held on these texts over the years. I have refined my own views of these passages with every fresh consideration.

To preview some of my findings, I have arrived at a view of headship which is more sharply defined. Headship as used in 1 Cor 11, as I have come to understand it, is a virtual synonym for primacy, "the right of first place." I have found that Paul uses the "primacy principle" and done so in the context of balancing principles. For example, Paul balances the primacy of creation with the primacy of motherhood, and in Ephesians 5, Paul balances the respect owing the husband based on the creation order (implied) with the powerful principles of submission to Christ and of self-giving love. In other words it is one principle among others. This, I believe, has a bearing on how we apply this principle. I trust this will become clear as the studies progress. For now, let me move on.

Gordon Fee in his lecture series does several things which I find helpful. I appreciate that he has clearly identified that in the NT that certain things -- those with enduring moral, or ethical, or theological force -- are presented with clarity. Other matters are presented with either ambiguity or inconsistency. And this calls for a certain humility and generosity in approaching the texts.

Second, Fee notes that often the Christian Church has sought to make of the Gospel a "new Law" and with it a new legalism. Let's also be watchful against this tendency.

The third thing which I think Fee does well is to identify that the interpretive gap is not only between "us and them," but also between "them and them." In other words, the NT church was born into a time and place where there were anti-biblical cultural norms. He illustrates it with a number of references which indicate that Second Temple Judaism [the Judaism that developed in the period of the Second Temple, 516 BC to 70 AD] had a very negative view of women.

Here are several examples:

Sir. 42:14 Better is the churlishness of a man than a courteous woman, a woman, I say, which bringeth shame and reproach (Sir 42:14);

Josephus who comments that the law says that a woman 'is in every respect of less worth than a man.' *Contra Apionem* 2. 201;

the Talmud, the codified teaching of the rabbis, thought to be reflecting attitudes present in NT times that 2 men were better than 100 women, and that happy is he whose children are boys and troubled is he who has girls.

Women had no standing in court and could not give testimony.

And then the traditional prayer, "Blessed art thou who has not made me a gentile, a beast or a woman."

This attitude stands in stark contrast to the NT teaching on women and particularly the practice of Jesus. The work of Joachim Jeremias is germane to this discussion. The comments that follow are largely drawn from his *NT Theology*, 226-7: In order to safeguard morality, Judaism kept women out of the public eye. It is amazing that in the gospels present Jesus meeting with women. The gospel of Luke is especially full of the enfranchisement of women by Jesus. "Something quite remarkable is happening here, for Jesus is dissociating himself from the practice of keeping women in seclusion. 'Do not speak much with a woman (on the street)', says an old Rabbinic proverb, and a later addition was that this also applied in the case of a man's own wife." In John 4: 27 Jesus openly talking with a woman much to the amazement of his disciples. Women were among his hearers (Lk. 11:27f); he was friendly with sisters, Mary and Martha (Lk. 10: 38-42); women followed and supported his ministry (Mk. 15: 40f. par.; Lk. 8: 1-3)

"The result of Jesus' attitude was that women thronged to him; as the passion narrative shows, they remained faithful to him in a degree of which the disciples were not capable."

"How was this break with custom possible? Matt. 5. 28 provides the answer. The world of Jesus set out to protect women by secluding them, believing that sexual desire was uncontrollable. Jesus accepts women in the group of disciples because he expects his disciples to control their desires. The old age is dominated by desires, from which a man protects himself as best he can. In the new age, purity rules, and disciplines even a man's gaze: [*blessed are the pure in heart*] (Matt. 5. 8). Nowhere in the social sphere does the new life make so striking an incursion into everyday affairs as here.

"The considerable antiquity of these traditions can be seen from their revolutionary character. Even Paul will have known them; this is the only possible explanation of the maxim in Gal. 3. 28, that in Christ Jesus there is no difference between male and female which is quite extraordinary for one who was born a Jew." To be continued... Pastor Phil

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