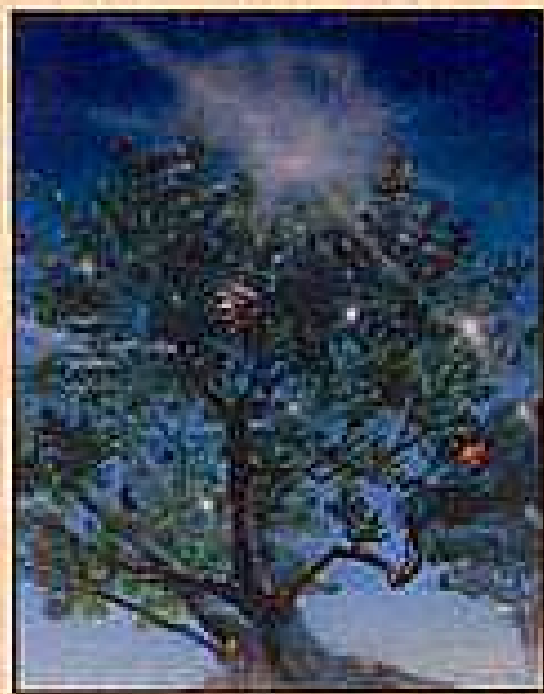


WOMEN,
CREATION

and the
FALL



Mary A. Kassian

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C O N T E N T S

Women, Creation, and the Fall

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P R E F A C E

Christian ideology has contributed no little to the oppression of women.

Simone de Beauvoir

The penning of these words by Simone de Beauvoir marked the beginning of the era of women's liberation. Her questions about the role of women in secular society in the sixties became the topic of discussion for the religious community in the seventies. Since that time, a myriad of books and articles have been published on the *Biblical* role of women. Yet, much confusion remains.

This book reflects my own personal struggle in coming to grips with the Biblical role of women in contemporary society. My thoughts have crystallized in this form, for in my studies I have found the bulk of writings on the Biblical role of women irresponsible in their handling of the Bible. The ones sound in their exegesis were few and far between and often were so technical they made tedious reading. I have thus attempted to broach the subject responsibly, employing the literal (grammatical-historical) method of interpretation, and then to present my conclusions in a readable manner.

The topic of women's role and ministry is volatile. Though eager to deal with it, I fear misunderstanding and misapplication of what I say. Therefore, I need to lay out some basic premises for the book. First, the concepts presented apply specifically to the Christian community. They cannot be applied to society in general. People who have not experienced the Holy Spirit's regeneration are incapable of understanding or applying Biblical principles, for it is only through the power of God's Spirit within us that we are freed for obedience. Second, I believe the *spirit* or intent of our actions is

just as important as our actions themselves. Following the Biblical model of the role of women without Christ-centered heart motivation produces only legalism. As far as I am concerned, rigidly applying Biblical teaching, while neglecting a spirit of freedom, unity, love, and understanding among believers, is a greater mistake than that of theological error.

In writing this book, I have attempted to present the Biblical ideal for the role of women. I understand that godly ideals and the practical outworking of correct doctrine are not always attainable in a sinful society, yet I feel that integrity in our obedience to Scripture must always be pursued. For in the role of women, as in any other area of life, only God's Word holds ultimate authority.

Finally, it is my pleasure to thank all those who have commented on various drafts of the manuscript. I am also deeply indebted to my parents for their faithful example; to Sheelagh, for her many prayers on my behalf; to Mike, for his unique perspective; to Sue, for her good questions; and most of all to Brent, for his constant love, support, and encouragement.

INTRODUCTION

Where does one begin to talk about the role of women? Emotions and sensitivities run high on this issue. Societal pressures and our own life experiences combine to make objectivity an elusive ideal. A myriad of conflicting views makes it difficult to reach a definite, viable conclusion as to what the role of the Christian woman should be.

The creation and Fall of mankind lay the foundation for New Testament role directives. We must, therefore, begin our study by turning to the early pages of Genesis to find God's original intent for woman.

Part One of this book will examine the created order in Eden, the distortion of this order by the Fall, and the implications for us today. Finally, it will discuss authority and submission inherent in the first male-female relationship and briefly overview hierarchical relationships in the New Testament.

Part Two will investigate God's order in the home by analyzing male and female roles in marriage and by discussing the problem of sex stereotyping.

Part Three examines God's order in the church. The most extensive section of this book, it deals with difficult passages and questions regarding headship and head coverings, the verbal participation of women in church meetings, and the appointment of women to church offices. Part Three will also investigate the feminist movement within the church, ministry, and common hindrances to women's ministry.

The role of women is a broad topic, overlapping many other areas of special concern. It is difficult to present it in isolation. I am acutely conscious of this fact, yet for pragmatic reasons I have had to strictly limit the parameters of this work. I only hope that the area chosen for study is adequate for a basic understanding of the created order and New Testament directives and that it answers at least some of the burning questions regarding the role of women today.

P A R T O N E :

**GOD'S ORDER
IN CREATION**

THE CREATED ORDER

An understanding of creation is central to a correct understanding of male and female roles, as all Biblical teaching on roles is contingent on this historic event. Gender roles are rooted in the created order, and apart from this context, cannot be understood. Therefore the Genesis account of creation is the underpinning for New Testament teaching on the role of women.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:26, 27)

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the gar-

den; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:7, 15-25)¹

In Eden, Adam and Eve lived in a world unmarred by the effects of sin. Their relationship was perfect and was characterized by unity and harmony. Here in the Genesis account of creation we see a prototype of the roles God had created for man and woman, and here we see the intended outworking of those roles. Although this passage is relatively brief, a careful analysis of it reveals much.

Genesis includes two accounts of the creation of mankind. Chapter 1 gives a summary of the entire act of creation, including the creation of male and female. Chapter 2 zeroes in on the events of the sixth day, detailing the creation of the sexes. The former pictures the creation of male and female as simultaneous, while the latter puts the creation of the sexes into a time-frame. The man was created first, and then the woman was created from the man’s side to be a “suitable helper” for him.

Chapter 1 focuses on creation from a slightly different angle

than chapter 2. Unfortunately, many have attended to one account and have excluded the other. Chapter 1 has been cited as teaching the absolute, unequivocal equality of the sexes, while chapter 2 has been used as rationalization for the inferiority of woman.² Neither of these extremes is correct. Chapters 1 and 2 complement each other, and the true picture of the created role of woman emerges only when both narratives are viewed together as a whole. Genesis 1 shows the uniqueness and equality of human beings, while chapter 2 balances the equality with role distinctions. These concepts are compatible. Equality and distinction coexist in the created roles of male and female. Let’s examine these themes more closely.

MALE AND FEMALE — CREATED UNIQUE AND EQUAL

The creation of man and woman is unique, for it was the first time a “consultation” took place regarding creation. Instead of saying, “Let there be man,” as He had before said, “Let there be light,” or instead of simply commanding the earth to bring forth man, we see a divine deliberation. God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness. . . .” Scripture represents God as conferring with the other persons of the Godhead before going ahead with man’s creation. This in itself proclaims the distinction of humans from the rest of creation.

The second fact which markedly contrasts man and woman to the rest of creation is that they were made in the *image* and *likeness* of God. Although the precise meaning of the image of God is still being discussed, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the image of God in human beings is reflected in their moral, intellectual, and spiritual likeness to Him³ (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24; 1 Corinthians 11:7). Humans thus reflect the image of God by virtue of their spiritual natures. They possess unique intellectual capacity, unique moral potential, and a unique spiritual personality in which the image of God is indelibly printed.⁴ Mernaahem Kasher summarizes: “Man alone among living creatures is gifted, like his Creator, with moral freedom and will. He is capable of knowing and loving God, and of holding spiritual communion with Him; and man alone can guide his actions in accordance with reason.”⁵

The image-likeness of God is a trait exclusively human. The Creator deliberated over the making of this unique species, and then gave them a unique blessing. Only humans were given the right and the command to multiply and subdue the earth. Humans are thus supreme over all else created. This status has not evolved through the process of natural selection, but existed from the very beginning. Therefore, according to Genesis 1, all human beings are unique in that they have been blessed with moral, intellectual, and spiritual likeness to God and that they have been placed in a position of authority over the animals.

Genesis 1 gives no indication of any difference between male and female. They are equal in their relationship to *God* (they are both created in His image) and to *nature* (they are both to fill the earth and subdue it).⁶ Chapter 2 provides details of the creation of male and female and their relationship to *each other*. It supports and underlines the equality presented in chapter 1, yet shows created role differences between the two sexes.

CREATION OF THE MALE (Genesis 2:7-19)

In the time-frame narrative of Genesis 2, we see the creation of the male occurring prior to the creation of the female. This chronological fact cannot be ignored or trivialized, as the Apostle Paul used this as basis for the principle of headship (this concept will be dealt with at length later). Because the New Testament refers to the order of creation, the sequence in which male and female were created is significant.

After God created the male, He placed man in the garden of Eden to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). Although the work Adam was to perform was not work as we now know it, his life was not one of indolence. He had WORK to do before the Fall. God gave Adam *responsibility* from the very beginning. God also gave Adam *authority*. He brought all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air to Adam to be named. Whatever Adam decided to call the animals, that was their name.⁷

In the Semitic world, the naming of something or someone was a statement of lordship or authority.⁸ Throughout Old Testament history, the chief officials of armies changed the names of

people or territories they had conquered (Daniel 1:7; Numbers 32:38, 42; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17). God named the light, the darkness, the firmament, the dry land, and the gathered waters to show His sovereign dominion over His creation. He called them Day, Night, Heavens, Earth, and Sea, respectively. Adam’s naming of the animals demonstrates his sovereignty and authority over them.⁹

Although dominion over the earth was given to humans in general, only Adam, the male, was given the responsibility to tend the garden and the authority to name the animals. Woman had not yet been created. Again, this fact is important, as we shall see later.

CREATION OF THE FEMALE (Genesis 2:20-23)

As God created, He evaluated His own work. After creating light, separating the light from darkness, and creating sky, land and seas, God evaluated His work as “good.” He then created vegetation, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all living creatures. This work was also judged to be good. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”¹⁰ Following this creation of the sexes, God pronounced His final judgment on what He had created . . . it was all *very good*. Only one time during the days of creation did God evaluate the situation as “not good.” This was prior to the creation of woman. Adam was alone in the garden. At this point, the Creator decided that it was not consistent with man’s highest happiness to be alone. Even before God brought the animals to Adam for naming, God purposed to make a counterpart for him. Adam needed a suitable helper.

The Hebrew word for “helper” is a powerful one. It is usually used in a concrete sense to designate the assistant rather than the assistance given. Most other times when this particular word is used in the Old Testament, it refers to *God* being our helper.¹¹ It usually refers to divine aid or assistance.¹² To infer that the woman was to be a helper akin to God may be overstating the case. However, in the creation of female, we see that a doormat or servant-slave was certainly not what God had in mind. God intended to make a counterpart for the man, a vital helper for him, perhaps in much the same sense as God is a helper. More importantly, we can observe that the helper of man was made “suitable”—corresponding to, or like him,

neither inferior nor superior. The woman corresponds to the man in that she, like him, is made in God's image.¹³

While Genesis 2 reemphasizes the essential equality of woman presented in chapter 1, it emphasizes that the creation of the female differed from the creation of the male. Francis Schaeffer noted that although the differences between the creation of male and female may seem trivial, they cannot be ignored without bringing real destruction to our theology. He observed that the Bible describes the creation of Eve as a *specific differentiation*, in its own way as much a differentiation as the creation of Adam himself.¹⁴

Eve was created in a different manner. She was created from the side of Adam rather than from the dust of the earth. She was also created for a different purpose. She was to be a suitable helper or counterpart to Adam. Adam and Eve were equal in terms of their standing before God, yet different from the very outset with regard to their purpose and function. The role differences and concurrent equality were understood by the first man and woman, and these are reflected in the interaction between the two.

ORIGINAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN

The primary focus of the relationship between the first man and woman was unity. When Adam saw the woman for the first time, he said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." (Genesis 2:23). Adam recognized the female God had created as being part of himself, made out of the same substance. "Bone of my bones" means bone, body, self, self-same.¹⁵ "Flesh of my flesh" emphasizes and amplifies the same idea. Adam recognized that the woman was the perfect counterpart to him. While she was an individual in her own right, she and Adam were meshed together in the totality of their beings. Adam expressed his joyous astonishment at the suitable helpmate. It might be paraphrased as: "Wow! This is actually part of me! This is an integral part of my being! I'm going to call her woman (Hebrew: *ishsha*) because she was taken out of man (Hebrew: *ish*)."

Adam recognized the unity between himself and the female.

However, he also recognized his God-given responsibility and authority by naming her. (Adam's act of naming the woman occurs again in Genesis 3:20 when he gives her the name "Eve" — mother of all living.) If the woman and man were meant to have identical roles, God would have named the woman, just as He had named the man. In giving Adam the responsibility to name the woman, a hierarchical relationship between Adam and the woman is established from the very outset. This in no way belittles the woman or assigns to her a lesser role. It simply reflects the difference between the roles that God had assigned to each. Adam was to be the leader in the relationship and the woman was to be the helpmate. These assigned roles blended together and coexisted alongside a perfect oneness and unity.

The name Adam gives the woman in Genesis 2:23 reemphasizes the primary characteristic of their relationship — unity. The Hebrew word for woman, *ishsha*, sounds like the Hebrew word for man, *ish*. While Adam could have called the woman anything he pleased, he recognized this creature as part of himself. Adam gave the woman her own name to recognize her uniqueness as an individual. He included his name within hers as a recognition of the unity between them.

The passage continues with: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." It is not certain whether this was a statement of God at the time, or if it was added by Moses when Genesis was written. However, one thing is clear — because of the created order and unity between man and woman/husband and wife, a man will leave the close ties he has with his parents and will be united to his wife.

United means to cleave, cling, stick to, follow closely, join to, cling to someone in affection and loyalty.¹⁶ "One flesh" reflects the totality of being: the heart, soul, and body united as one. This passage explicitly declares that the endearing marriage union is to be of a more intimate and sacred nature than any other relationship. The parties in a marriage relationship were to see themselves as entirely and indissolubly united, as if they were in reality one person, one soul, one body.¹⁷

To summarize, God's created order, His intended pattern, was one of unity. However, this order did not designate identical roles to

Adam and Eve. The leadership Adam provided was without chauvinism. The help Eve provided was akin to the help God Himself provides. Adam gave loving guidance to the relationship without domineering his wife. Eve willingly and gladly submitted to Adam's leadership as his equal counterpart.

In Eden . . . the man and woman knew each other as equals, both in the image of God, and thus each with a personal relationship to God. Neither doubted the worth of the other nor of him/herself. Each was to perform his/her task in a different way, the man as the head and the woman as his helper. They operated as truly one flesh, one person.¹⁸

Genesis paints a beautiful picture of the intended roles of man and woman. The hallmark of the first male-female relationship was one of unity and equality expressed through complementary, distinctive roles. The created role relationship was one of delightful perfection. Thus, after the creation of woman, we see God proclaiming His final evaluation of his creation. It was all good. It was all very, *very* good!

T W O

BORN CURSED

In the garden, man and woman lived in a state of perfection. They experienced total harmony with the Creator, with His creation, and with each other. This balance was destroyed when woman and man submitted to the will of the tempter rather than to the will of God. At that point in time, both the woman and man were cursed, inalterably changing the course of history and the outworking of the original created order.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:1-8)

THE TEMPTATION

Satan knew that both man and woman were created in the image of God. He knew that they were moral beings, created with the capacity to make decisions and to choose whether or not to obey. Why did the serpent tempt the woman rather than the man? Some expositors say that it is because the woman was weaker, inferior to the man. Had Satan first tempted the man, mankind would not have fallen. Others go to the opposite extreme.¹ They say that the serpent went to the woman first because she was the final perfecting element in creation. In causing the woman to fall, man was also destined to fall; but if the man fell first, the woman (the perfection) might not have disobeyed God's command. Another common explanation is that the tempter addressed the woman because she had not personally received the prohibition from God as Adam had.² Finally, a fourth possibility is that the serpent approached her because of a difference in woman's personality which made her more vulnerable to attack. Some of these explanations appear plausible, but we may never conclusively grasp the serpent's plan.

DOUBT AND DESIRE

The tempter's first words were, "Did God really say . . . ?" This was not a straightforward question. It was, rather, a deliberate distortion of a fact. "So God has *actually* said . . . ?" perhaps captures the flavor of the Hebrew more accurately.³ Satan was, in essence, jeering and scoffing at the word of God and planting seeds of doubt regarding the character of God in the woman's mind.

The tempter makes a massive affirmation, adopting a tone of surprise and indignation or else of feigned compassion, because he wishes to make the fact seem *outrageous*. Playing

craftily on the denial, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden," he presents the ban as a monstrous deprivation. It is not so much God's word on which he casts doubt as his *goodness*.⁴

First, the serpent casts doubt on the character of God, depicting Him by implication as selfish, jealous, oppressive, and repressive.⁵ Second, the serpent points to the material, aesthetic, and mental enrichment which the fruit offers. "The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom. . . ."

Thus, the temptation can be summarized as planting doubt and appealing to desire. The serpent cast doubt in the woman's mind regarding the character of God and appealed to the woman's desire for the good and admirable.

THE FALL

". . . she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." Although the dialogue of chapter 3 is between the serpent and the woman, Adam is obviously present. The woman was the first to eat the fruit and break God's command. Scripture informs us that the woman was *deceived* in taking the fruit. The man took the fruit after the woman, and he was *not* deceived.⁶ The woman was tricked into disobedience, while Adam took the fruit knowingly, going against the explicit command of the Creator.

The results of sin were instant. The created order had been violated, impairing the couple's relationship to God as well as their relationship to each other.⁷ Adam and the woman lost the fundamental sense of oneness they had before the Fall. Before sinning, the woman talks about their mutual actions in the first person plural: "We may eat." After sinning, Adam and the woman employ only the singular: "I heard," "I feared," "I was naked," "I hid." Their unity had disintegrated.⁸ This fact is further reflected in the "opening of their eyes" to realize they were *naked*.

The Hebrew word for "naked" is derived from the word which means to be exposed or laid bare.⁹ Prior to sinning, the couple was totally oblivious to their naked state. Their lack of embarrassment

suggests an innocence. After disobeying God's command, they became painfully aware of their guilt — stripped, as it were, of the perfection they were once clothed in. They felt guilt, fear, and spiritual nakedness before God. So much so that when the Lord God came to the garden in the cool of the evening, Adam and Eve hid themselves from His presence.

It is significant that when God confronted Adam and Eve, He asked both for explanations as to their behavior. Both were treated as responsible beings; both were held accountable for their actions. Adam, when questioned, shifted the blame onto the woman rather than acknowledge his own guilt. Eve likewise did not accept responsibility for her actions, but accused the serpent for her deception. God did not give the serpent a chance to explain. Instead, He cursed the serpent and revealed his eventual defeat.¹⁰ God then proclaimed the judgment on man's and woman's disobedience.

THE CURSES

The sentences passed on man and woman affected their relationship to God, nature, and each other. These judgments affected Adam and Eve after the Fall and have affected every human being since. Here in Genesis the battle between the sexes begins.

The Curse on Woman

To the woman he [God] said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

The curse on women is twofold — pain in childbearing and confrontation in the male-female relationship. The word "pains" comes from the Hebrew word meaning pain, sorrow, and toil. The root of this word refers to physical pain as well as emotional sorrow.¹¹ Other similar Hebrew words have the connotations "to writhe," "to grieve," "to become tired, weary," "to be irritated," "angry," and "to be bitter, despairing."¹² The Hebrew word for "childbearing" refers to the birth process, while the word for giving

birth may describe the act of a woman giving birth to a child, or in a broader sense, the whole procedure involved in producing or raising a child.¹³

Childbirth is painful. I had read about it and believed it before the birth of my first child, yet nothing could have prepared me for the intense agony of labor. Labor pain is simply inexplicable to one who has not experienced it. Dr. Ronald Melzack, a leading expert in the field of pain, has recently completed research on the intensity of labor pain. He found that, on average, labor pain ranks among the severest. According to his study, it may be exceeded only by the suffering of some terminal cancer patients and often is worse than having a finger amputated without anesthetic.¹⁴ It is difficult to imagine a relatively pain-free birth process; however, this is what the Creator had in mind prior to the Fall. Thus, the first part of the judgment on woman decreed physical and mental pain as well as emotional grief and turmoil in childbearing.

The second part of the judgment on woman is just as significant; yet it is often overlooked. Few are aware of its implications. "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

Some have interpreted this pronouncement to mean that woman would find man sexually or psychologically desirable. Others have interpreted the clause to mean that the woman would desire only what the man desires, and that she would have no command over herself.¹⁵ However, I believe a third interpretation more naturally arises from the Hebrew words and sentence structure. I consider it the closest to the Biblical author's intent and the best explanation for the role difficulty women experience to this day.

First, let us define the key words:

desire — attract, impel, longing, of desire or affection: intense drive, longing of woman for man, of man for woman, of beast to devour; hungering, intent upon.¹⁶

rule — to have dominion, reign, rule; to master.¹⁷

Although these definitions shed some light on the intended meaning, we cannot conclusively determine the author's intent in this manner. We must also consider the immediate context, the literary structure of the sentence, and the use of the words elsewhere.¹⁸

In the immediate context, God is judging sin. Therefore, the

“desire” of woman would not be something positive. The pattern established prior to the Fall was a hierarchy of roles characterized by unity and oneness. The judgment would work against, rather than contribute to, this original created order and unity. The “desire” of the woman would work against the leadership of the husband, against God’s original intent in marriage. Her desire would not contribute to his rule in any way.¹⁹

The literary structure of the clause supports this position. Literally, the clause reads: “You will do something to him and/or he will do something to you.” This clause is actually a form of poetry. One-third of the Old Testament is written in poetic form. Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelism, a feature which often helps shed light on the meaning of words in question.²⁰

Three types of parallelism are used in Old Testament writings: synonymous parallelism in which the same idea is stated in different phrases, antithetic parallelism in which the idea in the first part is clarified in the second part by contrast, and synthetic parallelism in which the second part develops the idea presented in the first part.²¹

The clause we are studying employs antithetic parallelism. The second part, “he shall rule over you,” is in direct contrast to the first part, “your desire shall be for your husband.” The contrast of the second part of the clause unlocks the meaning of the first part. We can conclude, therefore, from the type of Hebrew poetry used, that a woman’s desire is in direct opposition to the husband’s rule. The words *desire* and *rule* stand as antonyms to one another.

The third important factor for determining the author’s intent is the usage of the key word(s) elsewhere. The particular Hebrew word translated “desire” in this passage is used only three times in the Old Testament — twice by the author of Genesis (Genesis 3:16; 4:7) and once by another author (Song of Solomon 7:10). Examination of the way the Genesis author used the word elsewhere completes the picture of what he meant by woman’s desire, and consequently what he meant by man’s rule.

In Genesis 4:7, God is talking to Cain:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; *it desires to have you, but you must master it.* (italics mine)

The similarities between Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 4:7 are striking. Again, we see antithetic parallelism: “It desires to have you and/but you must master (or rule over) it.” Also notable, the Hebrew words translated “desire” and “rule” in Genesis 3:16 are *identical* to the words translated “desire” and “master” in Genesis 4:7. Since these verses were penned by the same author, it is probable that he used identical words and sentence structures to depict similar patterns of interaction. Thus, the curse on woman is that she would desire to conquer/devour/have her husband in the same way sin desired to have Cain. At the same time, the husband would attempt to rule/have dominion/reign over his wife in the same way Cain was to rule over sin.

To summarize, the best interpretation of the desire-rule clause is that after the Fall, women would rebel against their designated role and that men would abuse their role of leadership, thus creating tension in the male-female relationship.

The Curse on the Man

To Adam he [God] said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

The curse on Adam was twofold as well. First, God cursed the ground. Nature would no longer be in subjection to Adam. The earth would no longer spontaneously yield the fruits required for man’s existence. The man would be obliged to gain the necessities of life by strenuous exertion. Simple labor in the tillage of the earth was not a part of the curse, but was the destiny of man from the start. It was laboring in toil and sorrow, exhausting and wearing out the physical energies by the hardships of the fields, that made Adam’s judgment so bitter. His labor otherwise would have been a mere pleasant recreation.²²

The second part of Adam's curse reflects the judgment God passed on the entrance of sin into the world. Adam had been given authority and responsibility in the first male-female relationship. Because Adam didn't intervene during the deception of the woman, and because he followed her deception with his own willful disobedience, *Adam*, not Eve, is held responsible for sin entering the world.²³ Adam was ultimately held responsible for the violation of God's command. In God's eyes, he was *more* guilty than Eve. The corresponding penalty was death and corruption, both physical and spiritual.²⁴ This sentence is the most far-reaching. It included the woman and all of mankind. Prior to the Fall, man was destined to live forever spiritually and physically. Therefore, through Adam, the whole human race has come under the curse of physical death and corruption. All of mankind stands spiritually condemned as lost sinners because of Adam.

THE CREATED ORDER BROKEN

Evil is not in the good that God has created, but in the rejection of the order that God has instituted for the enjoyment of the world.²⁵

It has been suggested that the sins of woman and man were not all that bad. "Eve had the right idea," some claim. "Surrounded in Eden by an infinitely varied, deliciously fascinating environment, she rejected the haven of blissful ignorance and reached for knowledge — of herself and the world around her."²⁶ And who can fault Adam for supporting his wife in this quest?

No. The sin of woman and man was not that they desired knowledge, but that they misused and violated God's created order. Blocher observes that it is always in his use of the created order that man exercises the autonomy he pretends to have seized. For whenever man decides to be like God, "knowing good and evil," he rejects the created order and fails lamentably. The consequence of this offense was a continuing rebellion against this very order by all creation — humans, animals, nature, and the earth.

Eve broke God's order for the sake of earthly enjoyment, pleasure, and knowledge. She was punished, first with the sorrows and

pains of pregnancy and childbearing, and second with an internal rebellion against her role and a reciprocal harsh, domineering spirit in the man (who had once exercised his role in gentleness and love). In submitting to Eve's wishes and disregarding God's command, Adam broke the line of authority God had established.

The judgments passed at the Fall may seem harsh; however, God is perfectly holy and just. He had no choice but to pass judgment on the breaking of His command. In reality, the sentences passed reflect both God's justice and mercy. Justice was shown in the cursing of the serpent and in the punishment of mankind with marred relationships, labor, and mortality. Mercy was shown in the promise of eventual triumph over the serpent — the triumph of Jesus Christ who would have the power to overcome the curse imposed on mankind.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

The entrance of sin into the world changed man and woman's relationship to God, to creation, and to her/his fellow human beings. No longer do women and men walk in harmony with God. The unity and equality present in the first relationship has disintegrated. Role confusion, rebellion, and disharmony reign. Hard labor, sin, corruption, and death are unmistakable realities that face us every day. The judgments passed on Adam and Eve influence every human who has ever walked the face of this earth.

Of specific importance to the role of women is the judgment found in Genesis 3:16. This pronouncement sowed the first seeds of male chauvinism and women's liberation. The hierarchy, which functioned so well to produce unity and harmony prior to the Fall, was subjected to abuse from both sexes. Women, from the time of Eve on, would be born with a sin nature which would cause them to fight against male authority. Men would be harsh, domineering, and unloving in their attempts to crush and conquer women. Male chauvinism and women's liberation are nothing new. Genesis 3:16 is where both originated.

The consequences of the Fall affect us today. Women experience pain and sorrow in childbearing. Historically, they have sought to usurp male authority and leadership, only to be crushed and

oppressed. Men in turn, have abused their God-given role and have been oppressive, domineering, unfair, and unloving. They have often wrongly pronounced women inferior. The modern feminist movement has risen in the past few decades to combat male chauvinism and domination. However, the principle of men ruling over and women fighting back to overcome this rule cannot be broken by our own efforts. This is not something that has evolved historically and culturally. *It is a principle deeply engraved into our sin nature.* It is a direct result of the Fall and the judgment of God.

God sent Christ into the world to destroy the power of the curse.²⁷ At His second coming, the curses instituted at the Fall will completely pass. Presently, however, we are still affected by the kingdom of Satan. Women, specifically, are tempted to yield to modern-day philosophy regarding their role. Consequently, God has set out clear principles and concepts in His Word to guide us in our Christian walk. We have been given the examples and teaching of Jesus and the early believers as well as apostolic example and teaching. Herein is instruction governing Christian conduct in personal relationships, conduct in the Body of Christ, conduct in the assembly of believers, and conduct in the world. New Testament teaching on the role of women and men is given to counteract our natural sin tendencies. New Testament teaching on gender roles clearly instructs us to willingly place ourselves back into the proper created order.

Women have been born cursed. Although many women would wildly shake their heads in agreement and continue their plot to overthrow male domination, they forget that the curse on women is not rooted in the sin of man. The curse on women was brought about by a woman. It does not consist of the subordination of women, but rather in the *rebellion* against woman's subordination. Women are cursed in that they rebel against the created order. It is only when women embrace Christ and seek to live by the teaching of His Word that they are released from the bondage of the curse. It is only in adopting a Biblical perspective on male and female roles that women will be alerted to the sin tendencies in and around them and be truly liberated to fulfill their God-given role.

T H R E E

AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

Two basic concepts are inherent in the hierarchy of the created order — authority and submission. These concepts are not unique to the male/female relationship, yet they are repeatedly used in that context. A proper understanding of authority and submission is pivotal to our appreciation and application of New Testament teaching on the role of women.

The concepts of authority and submission are unpopular today. Our secular society has taught us to balk at the thought of hierarchical structure and the responsibility to submit. Individual rights are deemed more important than corporate responsibility, and any perceived intrusion on individual rights is vehemently contested.

The responsibility to submit in a hierarchy is often viewed as an intrusion on one's rights. This attitude has resulted in a breakdown of respect for authority and law. Parents, school teachers, law enforcers, government officials, and others in authority positions are openly mocked and defied. Hierarchy, and more specifically authority, is viewed as something to rebel against.

Because of the stigma attached to authority and submission within a hierarchy, it is important to begin by establishing the *Biblical* definition of these terms.

REINSTATING BIBLICAL HIERARCHY

Hierarchical structure is woven into God's overall design for creation. God is the source of the idea of authority, and He has allowed and ordained hierarchical relationships in which one party has authority over another.

God is the source, not simply of all authority; He is the source of the very concept of authority (Romans 13:1). That the universe should be ordered around a series of over/under hierarchical relationships is His idea, a part of His original design.¹

Scripture stresses the fact that each individual is equal and precious in God's eyes. It also reveals that God has established relationships within the framework of authority and submission. Equality in terms of spiritual privilege does not nullify the principles of authority and submission. Biblical equality and hierarchy are compatible concepts which occur simultaneously in Scripture.

The hierarchical structure which the Bible teaches can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

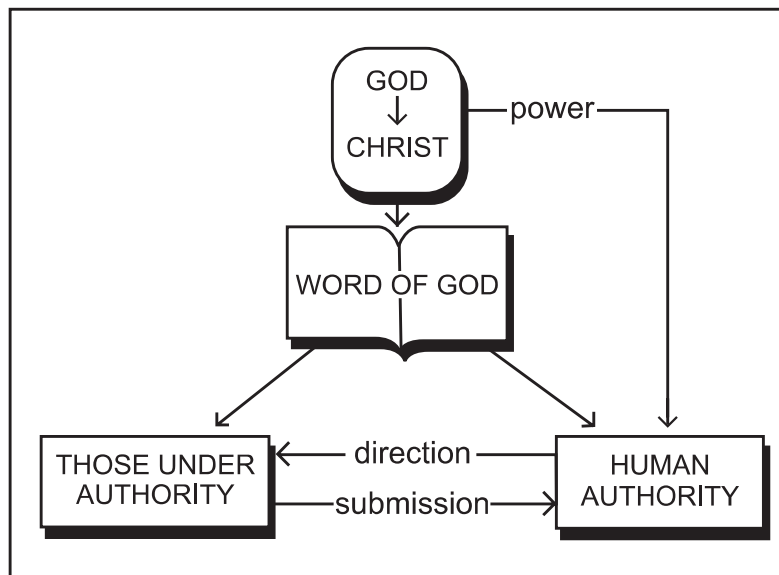


Figure 3.1

The diagram shows God in control of everything. Christ is equal to God the Father and yet at the same time is under God's authority.² God has given mankind His Word, and each individual is responsible for his/her response to it. Therefore, with regard to spiritual privilege, all people are equal. However, this equality exists within hierarchical relationships. God has ordained human authority structures and relationships in which one party is to lead and give direction while the other submits.

Some specific examples of hierarchical relationships present in the Bible are:

ROLE OF SUBMISSION	ROLE OF AUTHORITY
1. children	parents
2. slaves	masters
3. citizens	government
4. wives	husbands
5. believers	elders
6. Church	Christ
7. Christ	God

Although not all of the above relationships are ordained by God (for example: slavery), Scripture regulates the behavior of individuals within *all* of these hierarchical relationships.

Hierarchy is a part of God's plan for the ordering of His universe. God's principles of submission and authority apply to all. Let us therefore examine these principles in more detail.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBMISSION

Submission is the key concept to understand, for *everyone* is called upon to submit to God (James 4:7-10; Hebrews 12:9), and *all* at one time or another must submit to human authority. Believers who cannot submit to human authority do not know how to submit to God, for it is God who demands submission within human relationships. Conversely, believers will be ineffective leaders, incapable of properly fulfilling human authority roles, until they learn to submit to others. Submission is for *everyone*.

In order to understand Biblical submission, we must define it and deal with common misconceptions about it.

A dictionary defines submission as yielding to the power, con-

trol, or authority of another; being obedient and humble, willingly obeying another.³ The Biblical meaning of submission is similar. The New Testament Greek word translated as submission or subordination is *hypotassō*. The root meaning of *tassō* and its various forms is “put in order,” “arrange,” or “put in place.”⁴ In its active uses, the word means “to make subject.” In passive or reflexive uses, it means “to submit oneself.” Each of the more than forty New Testament uses of the verb carries an overtone of authority and subjection or submission to that authority.⁵ Thus, submission, simply defined, is obedience to one in authority.

Many misconceptions surround the idea of submission. People often confuse submission with a doormat or step-on-me-please attitude. Many maintain that submission negates human equality and that it demands a blind, mindless suppression of all reason. Let’s consider each of these misperceptions in turn.

Submission implies inferiority.

The most common misconception about submission is that it implies inferiority. However, this is not true. In the business world, for example, authority and submission are well understood and seldom questioned. Workers submit to supervisors; supervisors submit to managers; managers submit to vice-presidents; vice-presidents submit to presidents. Almost everyone is, at one time or another, in a submissive role. And the role of submission does not imply inferior worth, but simply a *difference* in the position held.

Nor does the leadership role imply superiority, for value of the individual is not determined by the position the person occupies. Submission is not a matter of lowering one’s worth, but of *recognizing the authority structure*.

To summarize, equality of persons and hierarchy are totally compatible concepts. Submission does *not* imply inferiority. It is a proper response to established authority.

Submission is blind obedience.

A second misconception is that the submissive person is docile and must blindly obey every whim of those in authority. The person who submits is pictured as a clinging-vine, with a dependent, passive personality. This individual buries his or her talents and intel-

lect to subordinate all personal interests to the one in authority.⁶ Some contemporary authors have identified submission as a self-retiring and self-effacing practice which denies one’s gifts and quenches one’s potential.⁷ Although this picture of submission is deficient, some accept it as truth and utilize it to justify rebellion against authority.

Submission is *not* self-retiring and self-effacing behavior, nor is it blindly yielding to every whim of those in authority. Submission is an *intelligent choice*, and it is an *act of the will*.

Let us again reflect on the business illustration. The submissive worker need not be a mindless “yes man.” He can and should try to maximize his potential. The worker can offer ideas and suggestions, develop new concepts, demonstrate initiative, and take on responsibility. If the supervisor makes a decision with which the worker disagrees, he can appeal the decision with wisdom and sound reason. Submission only comes into the picture when the supervisor dismisses the appeal and/or refuses to compromise. It is then the worker’s responsibility to willingly submit to the decision. Indeed, this submission is considered the mark of a *good* worker.

Similarly, *all* those in positions of submission are to be responsible in developing their gifts, maximizing their potential, taking initiative, offering new ideas, and communicating their feelings. Obedience is demanded only if a conflict of opinion arises and cannot be solved through discussion and compromise. In this case, the one in authority is to make the final decision, and it is the responsibility of the one under authority to submit.

Submission is mere compliance.

A third misconception is that submission merely requires that one comply with the decisions of the authority. However, submission is much more than that. It is an *inward attitude* characterized by humility. It is an attitude by which we voluntarily and gladly obey those in authority over us. We obey *not* because they are wiser or better; our obedience stems from a recognition of their position of authority and from an inward humility which submits to that authority. Outward compliance without inward compliance is not submission. Submission is an *attitude* of the heart.

The one in authority is also required to submit.

Mutual submission is also an incorrect concept, for submission is the responsibility of the *one under authority*. Although admonitions to bend to meet the needs of a submissive partner in a relationship, as well as to lead with love, consideration, and respect, *are* present throughout Scripture, the one in authority is *never* asked to submit to the subordinate.⁸ The term mutual submission is thus a misnomer and is foreign to Scripture.

Ephesians 5:21 is used as the proof-text to support the mutual submission concept. *Hypotasso* (Greek for “submit”) in verse 21 is interpreted to mean submitting to the needs of *each other*. Mutually looking out for each other’s needs and altering one’s behavior for the sake of the other is in line with Christ’s pattern of self-sacrificing love and is indeed what He wishes us to do. However, interpreting *hypotasso* as requiring *reciprocal* obedience within a hierarchical relationship obviously overlooks its New Testament meaning.

Hypotasso always requires *one* party in a relationship to submit to the other, and *not* vice versa. The context of Ephesians 5:21 supports this position. In this verse, Paul makes a *general* call to all Christians to submit to one another in whatever hierarchical relationships *they are involved in*. He then gives three *specific* examples of relationships in which submission of one party is required. Verse 21 is thus properly understood as an introductory verse to those which follow. As James Hurley points out:

Verse 21, “submit yourselves to one another out of respect for Christ,” is thus to be understood as a general heading indicating that there will be various situations in which certain believers will have to yield to the authority of others. The following text (5:22–6:9) sets out three particular relations in which this will be the case: wives will need to submit themselves to husbands; children will need to obey their parents, and slaves their masters. The idea of mutual submission has to do with various members of the congregation rather than with the two partners of each pair.⁹

Although the Bible does not teach mutual submission within an authority structure, it *does* teach principles of conduct which are

to be mutually practiced by all believers. Believers are to encourage, edify, be devoted to, and live in harmony with each other. They are to exhibit Christlike traits of gentleness, patience, and kindness. Believers have mutual responsibility to show concern, love, and respect for each other, and to esteem each other better than themselves. They are warned against being conceited and against biting, devouring, consuming, provoking, envying, hating, and begrudging one another.¹⁰ *This* is the mutual responsibility of both the one in authority and the one under authority. But *submission*, or obedience, is required *only* of the one who is under authority, not of the one in an authoritative or leadership position.

The one in authority is entitled to demand submission.

Those in leadership positions often feel that submission is their “right.” However, in human hierarchical relationships, submission is not to be demanded. Rather the one who is to submit has the responsibility to do so because of his/her relation to Christ.

God’s design calls for *willing* submission. This pattern is clear whenever persons are called upon to be subordinate. Those in human leadership positions are never told to *make* those under them submit. Submission for the love of Christ is set solely before the one who is to submit.¹¹

Submission has limits.

Obedying those in authority over us is an intelligent act of the will. We are to submit to leadership just as we would submit to Christ himself. However, many people focus on the *limits* to the Christian’s submission to human authority. They argue that our submission is first and foremost to God and that any authority which contradicts Biblical teaching need not be heeded. Thus, submission is often glibly dismissed as inapplicable when it becomes inconvenient or difficult or when it is perceived by the one under authority to violate one of God’s principles.

However, the Bible does not qualify the extent of our submission to authority. If we find ourselves in a situation where obedience to authority directly contradicts God’s Word, we should appeal to that authority. If our appeal fails, we must appeal to God Himself,

for He is the one who has allowed us to be in a submissive position. Guidance in such specific instances must come from God Himself.

Consider the Apostle Peter. Frequently he was commanded by governmental authorities to stop preaching the gospel (Acts 5:28). Peter was unable to do so since his directions to preach the gospel had come directly from God. Even though he could not obey the government's wishes, his attitude of submission was evident. He willingly (never complaining or criticizing) suffered the consequences of his disobedience to them (Acts 5:41).

Practically, there may be situations in which submission to authority is limited. However, these situations are few and far between. Our focus should be on humility and obedience to authority in *all* circumstances. Submission may indeed have limits, but these limits are the exception rather than the rule. Obedience to God generally means obedience to those in authority over us.

To summarize, submission is obedience to one(s) in authority. It does not imply superiority or inferiority, nor does it negate the principle of human equality. Submission is a proper response to established authority. It is an intelligent choice of the will and an attitude of the heart. Submission is required only of the one under authority and is to be given willingly, motivated by love and obedience to Christ. The one in authority does not have the right to demand submission. Obedience to human authority is obedience to God.

THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

The principle of submission does not stand in isolation from the principle of authority. Most dictionaries define *authority* as the right to command or act. In the New Testament, use of the word refers to delegated power, permission, or license.¹² Biblical authority is not taken upon oneself, but rather is given or delegated by another. For example, Christ was given authority by God; Christ gave the disciples and apostles authority; Saul was given authority by the chief priests, and the centurion was given authority by those above him.¹³ Biblical authority is thus power and permission to command, act, or lead, which has been *delegated* to the one in authority.

Many people, feminists in particular, feel that the concept of authority is incompatible with other Biblical teaching. They argue

that "no person can remain unspoiled by the corrupting effect of power when he is told that he holds by divine right a position of superiority in which others are duty-bound to subject themselves to him."¹⁴ According to their reasoning, female subordination to male authority in the marriage relationship creates in the male the desire to dominate, exploit, and manipulate the woman as an autocrat lords it over his subjects.¹⁵ On this basis feminists reject the teaching on authority and submission in hierarchical relationships.

Feminists' concern regarding corrupted power and oppression is valid. God has the same concern. He has commanded those in authority to exercise that authority with love, humility, and justice.¹⁶ But New Testament writers *did not* eliminate hierarchical roles. Rather they regulated behavior within the roles to prevent abuse. As Litfin correctly states, "Wherever there is properly constituted authority, there is also the potential for abuse. The Biblical answer to this problem, however, is not to eliminate that authority, but to use it in a way that honors Christ."¹⁷

Jesus taught that authority was for the purpose of service (Luke 22:24-27). He warns against exercising authority excessively or arbitrarily in a "lord-it-over-them" attitude.¹⁸ Jesus did not do away with authority. He was, however, concerned that authority be exercised in the proper manner. Those in authority have the responsibility to *serve* those under them. They are to be considerate and are to make leadership decisions in the best interests of those they lead.

Jesus did not argue against the disciples having authority; He simply regulated the *exercise* of that authority.¹⁹ Although the tendency for any leader, affected by sin, is to be callous and overbearing and to disregard the person and feelings of the one under authority, the New Testament admonishes against this. Conversely, the tendency for the subordinate, affected by sin, is to be disrespectful and rebellious. The New Testament admonishes against this tendency as well.

For every human hierarchical relationship presented in the Bible, commands are given to both parties to counteract natural sinful tendencies. Those under authority are commanded to willingly submit, obey, and respect, while those in authority/leadership positions are to exercise their power with love and a serving spirit. Following is a list of God's bilateral commands:

COMMAND TO COUNTERACT POTENTIAL ABUSE

1. *Children*—obey.
(Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1)

Parents—do not exasperate or embitter children.
(Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4)

2. *Slaves*—obey, submit, serve wholeheartedly.
(Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:6, 7;
1 Pet. 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:1)

Masters—treat slaves well, don't show partiality, provide what is right and fair, don't threaten them.
(Col. 4:1; Eph. 6:9)

3. *Citizens*—submit, obey.
(Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-19;
Titus 3:1)

Governing Authorities — God will regulate behavior of government.
(Rom. 13; Proverbs 21:1)

4. *Wives*—submit, obey, respect.
(Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1;
Eph. 5:22-24; Titus 2:5)

Husbands—be considerate, treat with respect, don't be harsh, love as Christ loved.
(1 Pet. 3:7; Col. 3:19;
Eph. 5:25-29)

5. *Believers*—submit, respect.
(Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12;
1 Pet. 5:5)

Elders—don't "lord over" flock, be examples, lead by serving.
(1 Pet. 5:3-5)

An additional measure to minimize abuse of power is the command to *all* Christians to fulfill their mutual responsibility to love and serve each other. Hierarchical roles can and should exist within the framework of mutual love and service. The hierarchical structure cannot be dismissed as evil simply because of potential or real abuse. God has allowed and ordained hierarchical roles. The goal of New Testament teaching is not a society without authority/submission roles, but a social hierarchy, ordained by God and functioning in a manner that fulfills the teaching of Christ.²⁰

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

Christ is our example for the proper outworking of hierarchical roles. He is the *perfect* model both of willing submission and of loving authority.

The New Testament teaches that God the Father and Jesus Christ are equal—that they are one.²¹ Yet, within the Godhead, a hierarchy of authority and submission exists. Christ is equal to God the Father, but is under the authority of God. The Bible teaches that Christ recognizes the authority structure and submits obediently to God's will. God is "head" over Christ; God is the one who delegates authority to Christ, and God is the one who put all under Christ's feet. Christ's position is thus one of submission.²²

We are told that it was *God's* will that Jesus Christ die for mankind and that *God* is the one who sent Christ to earth. Christ, who was in very nature God, did not consider His equality with God something to be held on to. He made Himself nothing and obediently gave up His own life.

Christ's plea in Gethsemane is the epitome of submission. The night before His crucifixion, knowing full well what was about to transpire, Christ prayed: "*Yet not as I will, but as you will*" (Matthew 26:39). Christ did not want to die! If it had been up to Him, He would not have gone through with the crucifixion. Even though He had the power to stop it, Christ willingly emptied Himself of all His own rights and fulfilled His responsibility by yielding to His Father's will. He did not demand His rights although He was in His very nature God — equal to God. It is hard to imagine Christ saying to God, "God, I know You want me to do this, but as I'm not thrilled about the idea, I'm going to call down the angels and put a stop to this!" He could have, but He did not.

Submission is not an easy process. Pride and selfishness often get in the way. Although we as people are all equal, we are called to get rid of pride and selfishness and willingly submit to those in authority. Biblical submission involves following the example of Christ: "*Not as I will, but as You will.*" This is how believers are to submit to God-ordained human authority.

The Bible tells us that God has delegated to Christ all authority. Christ could have called legions of angels to His side in an instant. He could have defied and destroyed all who resisted Him. However, Christ was humble. He did not come to be served, but to serve with love and humility (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Christ taught by words and example, and those in positions of authority should emulate His management of authority. Christ said to the apostles, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew

23:11). Therefore, Christ expected that the apostles would use their delegated authority for the purpose of serving others.

The qualities of servanthood, humility, and love do not nullify the principle or position of authority. Instead, they ensure that the authority will be exercised in the proper manner. Those in authority are to serve those who submit by loving and considering them. Also, they are to make wise leadership decisions for the benefit of those they lead. Authority exercised in a godly manner always protects those under authority from abuse. The primary motivation in the exercise of authority is love. Love demands the choosing of the highest good for those in submission.

Therefore, the New Testament revolutionizes the manner in which authority is to be carried out. Christ is an eloquent and eternal illustration that love (including service) and authority (hierarchy) are compatible.²³

HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIPS REGULATED

The Apostle Paul regulated behavior within hierarchical relationships, but he did not intend to convey equal approval of them or to imply that they are all essentially of the same order.²⁴ The Scriptural principles of authority and submission tell us how to interpret the examples of hierarchical relationships given in the Bible. The examples, in turn, help clarify the principles, but the examples themselves do not necessarily have lasting applicability. For example, the principles of authority and submission are still valid, although the example of slavery does not apply in our country.

This is important to understand, for many feminists argue that if we accept Paul's teaching about wives submitting to husbands as universally applicable, then we must also accept slavery and government by kings as universally necessary.²⁵ They subsequently conclude that the examples are *all* culturally relative (i.e., that they do not apply to us today). The logical conclusion of the feminist line of reasoning would be that children need not submit to parents nor citizens to the government.

Feminists cite the Biblical example of slavery to discount all hierarchical relationships. However, the Biblical teaching on these relationships does not require one to accept slavery. Biblical *princi-*

ples are eternal, but *examples* of the principles may change, depending on the culture. We will review the examples of hierarchical relationships in order to determine which are of eternal significance and which were cited merely because of their evidence in the culture of the time.

Children/Parents

The relationship of children to parents was obviously established by God (Genesis 1; Proverbs 22:6). Children need leadership and guidance, and God has established parents as the authority to which children must submit. These roles are assigned by age and kinship.

Slaves/Masters

Nothing in the passages dealing with slaves and masters indicates that the relationship is ordained of God. Paul instructs men in the situation in which they find themselves without implying that God desires to perpetuate this situation.²⁶ Paul instructed slaves how to conduct themselves within the human institution, and yet at the same time he recognized that slavery could end. Slavery is not ordained by God, but behavior within this human institution was clearly regulated.

Citizens/Government

The Bible refers to government by king (1 Peter 2:13, 17), by Caesar (Matthew 22:21), and by "governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). Kings are mentioned only as an *example* of governing authorities. The New Testament does not require *kings*, but *does* present government as divinely instituted and gives instructions as to a Christian's response to it. Therefore, civil authority is ordained by God; however, the precise political form this authority should take is not specified.

Wives/Husbands

Marriage was ordained by God at creation. Certain roles were instituted at that time. The role of husband leading and wife submitting are reiterated and expounded in New Testament teaching. Therefore, this relationship has eternal significance. Marital authority is approved of by God, and roles are assigned by gender.

Believers/Elders

Christ established His Church universal and gave instructions through the apostles as to how the church local was to function. Believers in local assemblies are instructed to submit to the leadership of the elders. This relationship was established by Christ and is applicable cross-culturally. The role of elder is assigned by spiritual maturity and by gender.

Church/Christ

Christ established the Church. God obviously approves of the Church's submissive role.

Christ/God

Submission/authority roles within the Godhead are difficult to understand; however, Scripture is clear that Christ as God the Son submits to God the Father.

We can conclude that some examples of hierarchical relationships cited in the New Testament are temporal, and some are eternal. First, the parent-child relationship, marital relationship, and the relationship of believers to elders are *not* altered by time. Second, although behavior is regulated in the relationship of citizens to the governing authorities, the form of government may change. Finally, the institution of slavery is not applicable in contemporary Western society. If the apostles were alive today, they might have used the employer/employee relationship as an example of submission rather than slavery.

. . . the unchanging word of God speaks authoritatively to the culture of man that God allows to pass away (slavery), to the culture of man that God allows man to appropriately change (civil government), and to the culture of man that God requires man to maintain (the form of authority and headship in marriage).²⁷

The principles of authority and submission are still applicable today. They must be applied in those institutions which God has ordained.

SUMMARY

The principles of authority and submission are not popular in contemporary Western society. This unpopularity is mirrored in the church. Contemporary theologians are attempting to disclaim the hierarchical structure taught in the Bible, and many Christians have been led to believe that the principles of authority and submission are not applicable to us today.²⁸ Those who disown Biblical hierarchical relationships are considered “enlightened,” while those who adhere to the traditional interpretation are accused of “twisting” the meaning of Scripture.²⁹

My position is that hierarchy is taught by the Bible and that it is *essential* to a Christian worldview. Christian men and women need to learn how to fulfill roles of authority and submission in a godly manner, for hierarchical relationships are part of God's plan — part of His created order.