

Report of the Committee on the Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scriptures

Background

In November of 1981 the Conference of Presidents completed their appointments of ten men, one from each district, to a committee for studying the Bible teachings on the relationships of men and women. The committee met for the first time in early December to agree on what its work should be and to plan and schedule that work so that it could be completed by the April 1982 deadline set by the Conference of Presidents.

The approach taken by the committee was guided by the very short period of time available to us, by the resolution of the 1981 Synod convention, and by the knowledge that public hearings had already been encouraged and held in congregations, conferences and districts. Within this context the committee decided to work only with the principles in the case. In the two months following our December meeting we solicited and received dozens of essays and conference papers from all over the Synod. All of these were made available to all of the committee members. During the same period men who had written or spoken distinctively on the matter were invited to appear before our committee.

For a full week our committee met in the beginning of February. We spent the first day and a half listening to those whom we had invited to address us. We spent Tuesday afternoon and evening at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary talking to the faculty and then to Professor Carl Lawrenz. We devoted the last three days of our sessions to our own study of the Scripture in closed meeting. As we studied the Bible we wrote down statements of principle which we in turn committed to a writer at the end of the sessions.

After Easter the committee met once more to edit the writers' copy. Because one of the committee members could not be present at the meeting, some subsequent changes were made in the copy before it was presented to the Conference of Presidents. The presidents agreed to submit the paper to their district conventions this summer as a study paper and are making arrangements for formal feedback to the committee from each district. This fall the committee will meet again to consider the responses and reactions from the districts. Then the committee will finish its assignment from the Synod resolution to put an informational writing in the hands of the Synod's constituency.

Introduction

Our study paper contains four characteristics which may distinguish it from previous studies in the mind of the reader.

First it employs a narrative style rather than the strictly thematic and outline approach of a dogmatic study or the thesis-antithesis approach of a confessional document. The committee chose this style for a number of reasons. We wanted to leave the impression of a new study and a fresh approach. We also felt the narrative style followed the same progression by which the Holy Spirit revealed God's will in this matter throughout the history of the world. We wanted the paper to be readable and appealing. We wanted to show the interdependence of a number of biblical principles on the same subject. We did not choose the narrative style to avoid dogmatic or confessional statements. We know you will find specific statements on all the matters which have been discussed among us in the past.

The second distinguishing characteristic of the paper is one we were directed to include by the synodical resolution. The paper speaks about women and men. We hope it presents the balanced treatment we were asked to give. This characteristic of our paper is in no way a criticism of earlier studies which focused on either the male or the female. It is simply a reflection of the will of the Synod in convention that a final resolution of this matter requires all of us to know how God wants us to live for him in this world.

A third feature of this writing is the omission of the word "subjection" in describing the role relationship of woman to man in Genesis 2. We do not feel this does violence to the unity of Scripture even though New

Testament passages use the word in application of the principle in Genesis 1 and 2. This is why. The principle of man-woman relation was established before the fall into sin. That principle is described in the Bible and in our paper as a headship-helper relation. It is clear that man was created first and woman second and that this creative order establishes the leadership and authority in the man-woman relation, not just chronology. It is also clear that this relation of authority and assistance was meant by God to apply to all men and all women of all time.

Yet the word “submission” is used by the Holy Spirit only after sin. No change has taken place in the will of God since before the fall, but the way in which sinful humans perceive God’s will has changed. A relation that included authority before, the fall is now applied by the Spirit to the sin-darkened perception as “rule” and “submission.” The principle remains unchanged, but the Spirit chooses to expand and define the application of the principle under sin. If submission is indeed a part of the principle of relation clearly applied universally before sin in Genesis 1 and 2, then we will have to say that all women are to be submissive to all men.

A fourth characteristic of the following paper is closely related to the third. It has to do with the role of men and women in society. The principle of Genesis 1 and 2 is that all men in general are to be heads and all women in general are to be helpers. How that principle is to be carried out after sin is clearly shown by the Bible with its many and specific applications to marriage and church life. The principle also must apply to society. Because specific applications are lacking, however, we must be cautious not to extend every application of marriage and church life into society and be careful not to make specific judgments in society without Scriptural warrant.

May our work with your review serve the glory of God and the good of his people.

Man and Woman in God’s World

I. In God’s Perfect World

In every Christian there is an aching for Eden, an earnest longing for life as God intended it to be when He first made man and woman. Even the most casual reading of the opening chapters of Genesis reveals what a blessed state man and woman are living in immediately after their creation. Moses tells us in Genesis 1 that God graciously bestows the most wonderful blessings on both the man and the woman as He creates them. Both of them will share in His image, partaking of His perfection and enjoying all necessary knowledge of Him and His will for their lives. Both man and woman will exercise dominion over the created world. And after He creates them, God imparts to both the blessing to be fruitful and multiply.

Who wouldn’t long for such an existence, where man and woman share fully in God’s blessings and where they live in perfect harmony with their God and with one another? We can easily understand why God looks upon that world and considers it “very good.” And merely reading about life in Eden evokes in us an unusual homesickness, a longing to return to a place we have never visited.

The second chapter of Genesis leads us to appreciate the unity of man and woman whose creation Moses has already described in Genesis 1. In particular, in the second chapter we see the interdependence of man and woman as Moses gives us a more detailed account of their creation. After God has created man and has put him in the garden, a place we properly call “paradise” without fully understanding what we’re saying, He says that “it is not good that the man should be alone.” (v.18) God Himself defines what is “not good” about man’s situation when He adds that He will make “an help meet for him.” The male Adam does not yet have one who corresponds to him, one who will fill what is lacking in his life and who will join with him in carrying out God’s plan for their lives.

The important position that the woman is to fill in the man’s life becomes apparent when we reflect on the meaning of the word “help.” This is a term that God often uses to describe Himself in relation to His chosen people. In Psalm 70, verse five, the inspired writer confesses God as his “help” using this very word with which the Lord describes the one He will create for the man. The woman will provide what the man lacks and needs,

just as God comes to His people in their need and strengthens and supports them. By himself man cannot complete God's plan for his life, including also the later injunction to be fruitful and multiply. He needs the woman whom God will provide. God creates the woman to be a help for the man, which is why Paul later writes that the man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man (I Corinthians 11:9). Their mutual joy and fulfillment will come as they join to carry out God's plan for their lives.

The special creative act by which God brings forth the woman shows the man how necessary a part of his life she is. Before creating the woman God has the man name the animals. This naming process serves to show man that he doesn't have one who corresponds to him. As Adam calls the animals by the names they are to have, he thinks God's thoughts after Him. He comes to the same understanding that God already has of his situation. Adam now sees that there is something "not good" about being alone, even though he is living in paradise. When God makes the woman out of the man's flesh and blood, Adam understands that he now has one who corresponds to him in the fullest sense. He even calls her "woman" to show how closely related they are. She is one "taken out of man." (v.23) By this creating act we understand that Adam and Eve are the representatives of all men and women to follow.

Adam's delight at the creation of Eve is unmistakable. What joy fills his heart as God brings Eve to him for the wedding. "At last:" the man says. This now is one who truly corresponds to him, one with whom he can blend in perfect harmony. This is the one with whom he can carry out God's will for their life here on earth. Adam rightly exults in the gift of Eve as God brings her to him.

As we look back on the joyous relationship between man and woman in paradise, we cannot but long for that blissful harmony. In the garden two wills became one, for they were united perfectly in God's will. The singers and the song were inseparable, for whatever God willed Adam and Eve willed also.

From our perspective today it is difficult to recapture all that paradise involved, for our vision has been blurred by the cataracts of sin. But the Holy Ghost did inspire the sacred writers to draw certain conclusions based on the relationship between Adam and Eve in paradise. Thus Paul refers to the basic principles that "the head of the woman is the man" (I Corinthians 11:3), and "the man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man." (I Corinthians 11:9) And when he tells Timothy that a woman is not "to usurp authority over the man," he bases his directive on the chronology of the creation, on the fact that "Adam was first formed, then Eve." (I Timothy 2:11-13) The importance of the creation account, therefore, is that it teaches us both the unity and interdependence that God intended to exist between man and woman and the headship-helper roles they are to fulfill.

We do not want to get the impression that the first chapters of Genesis only serve to show us an idyllic situation for which we are to long but to which we can never attain. We recognize that these opening chapters are for our instruction; in them God lays down the basic principles that are to guide men and women in their relationships with one another. God's principles may not receive explicit expression in Genesis 1 and 2, it is true, but that does not mean that they do not exist; that only indicates that they were not necessary in Eden. Facts such as Adam being created first are not without significance, because we saw before that the Holy Spirit moves Paul to draw certain conclusions from it. But whatever conclusions or applications we make on the basis of the creation account will be those which Scripture itself leads us to make. Both Genesis 1:27 and Jesus in Matthew 19:4 tell us that when God made the human race, he made the two sexes male and female. So the creation account lays the foundation for all male-female relationships. The rest of God's Word defines and clarifies how we are to apply God's will in various situations.

II. In the Fallen World

We believers readily acknowledge how much we need God's directives to guide our relationships, for we know the truly corrupting nature of sin. From Genesis 3 we learn of the tragedy that came upon the world when man fell into sin, and ate of the forbidden fruit. And we learn almost immediately that the harmony of perfection is replaced by the dissonance of sin.

In the temptation the serpent approached the woman first, and she fell into sin and ate of the forbidden fruit. Paul tells us that her sin came as a result of her being deceived. He further adds that “Adam was not deceived.” (I Timothy 2:14) The apostle is not trying to lessen the guilt of man or to make him less responsible for his act. In fact, in Romans Paul reminds us that Adam was fully responsible, for he states that “by one man sin entered into the world”. and that “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” (5:12,19) But we still take note of the difference between the way the man and the woman fell into sin, for Paul later makes specific application on the basis of that difference.

Sin changed the way man and woman viewed and exercised their relationships. It destroyed man’s relation with God first of all, but its effects did not stop there. It quickly shattered the perfect harmony that man and woman had formerly enjoyed. We see this after the fall when God came looking for the man, showing that He held him responsible for what had happened. Both Adam and Eve in turn sought to evade their personal responsibility. They thus gave sad but unmistakable testimony to the truth that sin had corrupted the most precious of human relationships

When God spoke to Adam and Eve after the fall, He pointed out just how far reaching the ravages of sin would be. They both would still have dominion over the earth, as they had before the fall, but now even the earth was under the curse of sin. God’s once-perfect world would now bring forth thorns and thistles. Although man would still enjoy its fruits, he would do so only in the sweat of his face. Another evidence of the all-pervasive power of sin would appear in childbearing. God did not take this most blessed of roles from Eve, but He did indicate that sin would change its nature. In her role as childbearer Eve would now know pain and sorrow, where once she would have experienced nothing but joy. The harp that once sounded only happiness would now produce the strains of sorrow as well.

Sin corrupted the way men and women carried out their relationship with one another. God had made Eve for Adam because man could not fulfill God’s purpose without her (Genesis 2:18), but now she would find that she would be unwillingly dependent upon him. She had been created to stand alongside him, and be his helper, but now he would rule over her: the headship of man which she once perceived as all joy would no longer be exercised in perfect love. The woman would at times chafe under her husband’s headship, and man would sometimes abuse his position as head. In short, the weeds of sin would overrun Eden.

Because of the corrupting effect of sin, God spelled out more fully the relationship that is to exist between men and women, especially in marriage. Our sinful nature may rebel against these directives, but we do not do so as children of God, any more than the branch rebels against the tree. We recognize that God’s guidelines are necessary because of the appearance and power of sin in our lives. Our wills are no longer in perfect harmony with God’s. Our sinful, self-serving natures frequently show themselves, even in that most precious of human relationships, marriage. So as the redeemed children of God we delight in the fact that God has given us His moral law, knowing that thereby our Lord directs us in the way that will lead to our happiness.

We Christians listen with humility as God describes the consequences sin brings into all relationships, particularly that between husband and wife. For we confess how true His words have been in our own lives. The history of man has, in some ways, been a history of unloving treatment of women by men. What is even more sad, many of the inequities and injustices which women have endured have been excused by an improper interpretation of Scripture. Customs that were strictly cultural in origin, such as wearing hats and separate seating were often accredited to Scripture. And what God foresaw (Genesis 3:16) in sorrow as happening in the man-woman relationship because of sin has sometimes been used to defend and justify sinful words and actions. Sometimes people have failed to distinguish clearly between what God described as being the outgrowth or result of sin and what He prescribes as His good and gracious will. Men and women have sometimes forced each other to eat of a bitter fruit and then have attempted to say that God planted the tree from which it came.

The remedy for the ravages of sin is that which God promised as soon as Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. Both of them received the gracious promise of the Savior, called the woman’s “seed” in the first Gospel proclamation. (Genesis 3:15) This is a promise that makes no distinctions whatsoever. Paul reminds us that “as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men unto condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came unto all men unto justification of life.” (Romans 5:18) The Gospel transcends all

distinctions and divisions which sin has brought into the world, for by faith in the Son of God all are declared righteous.

We should not think that the promise of the Savior thereby does away with God's moral law. His will is unchanging, as is the sinner's need for daily guidance. And so it will be until we are transported to the eternal Eden where we shall live in perfect harmony with God and one another. Until then even we Christians will need God's law, both as a rod of rebuke and a staff of guidance.

III. In God's Redeemed World

One of the areas in which God gives specific guidance for man-woman relationships is marriage. Speaking through the apostle Paul He applies to the Christian marriage the principle of headship which He first laid down in Genesis 2. One of the first passages in which Paul touches on the principle of the male as head and the female as helper is in I Corinthians 11. As we read Paul's word there, we will want to keep in mind that the apostle's primary concern is not to offer a full treatise on the marriage relationship. His chief interest is to instruct the Corinthian congregation on good order in their worship services, and it is in that context that he offers the women in the congregation instruction that also pertains to their relationship with men.

Paul begins by speaking of headship generally, reminding us that we all are under a head, even as Christ Himself: The head of the woman is the man; the head of man is Christ; and the head of Christ is God the Father. By beginning this way the apostle serves a double purpose. First of all, he puts the exercise and acceptance of headship in a truly spiritual context. Both the man and the woman will recognize that any headship in our lives is an outgrowth of our relation with God and is to reflect that relation. Equally important, Paul shows us that acknowledging someone as our head is neither demeaning nor degrading. As Christ could recognize the Father as His head, so we can gladly acknowledge those whom God has placed over us, be that person Christ, the head of the church, or the husband as head of the wife.

The application Paul makes in I Corinthians 11 on the basis of the headship principle is clear. To the woman Paul says that she is to recognize her husband as her God-ordained head. And because he is that, she will conduct herself in a way that exhibits that she acknowledges his headship. For the Corinthian women it meant wearing a veil when they entered the worship area, for the veil was a recognized symbol for both single and married women indicating a general humility over against men (I Corinthians 11:5) and a submissiveness to the men over them (Ephesians 5:23). In our day it will mean that women will conduct themselves in a way that shows clearly that they acknowledge their husbands as their heads in the Lord. To the men Paul says that every man will exercise his headship as one who is himself under a head, Christ. And men will especially want to give testimony to their dependence on women, bearing in mind that they cannot fulfill God's purpose for their lives "without the woman." (v. 11)

In Ephesians 5 and I Peter 3 we receive a fuller exposition of the divine blueprint for marriage relationships. Both of these passages place a heavy responsibility on the husband. In Ephesians 5:25 Paul enjoins husbands to love their wives "even as Christ also loved the church." That exhortation alone excludes any high-handed or harsh rule by those who are husbands "in the Lord," for Christ compels us to follow Him by the power of His winsome love, not by the force of His law. At the same time, the passages from Ephesians and I Peter both call upon wives to submit themselves to their husbands. In both cases, though, the apostles call upon women to submit themselves; they do not tell husbands to see that their wives are subject. The apostles also stress that wives will submit themselves "as unto the Lord," teaching Christian wives to see their submission as an outgrowth and expression of their love for Christ.

When we look at the fuller range of Bible passages that discuss the relationship of husbands and wives in marriage, one truth emerges again and again: The relationship that God spelled out immediately after the fall has not been set aside by the coming of Christ. God was not giving Adam and Eve an injunction that applied only to them or only during the Old Testament dispensation. In Genesis 3 God repeated His unchanged will for marriage, and the apostles show that this is so by repeating that will and reaffirming its application to marriages in the New Testament era. While all Christians are one in Christ and share equally in His blessings, we still

have specific roles that God assigns to us in marriage. And in the marriage relationship God places the husband in the role of head and calls upon the wife to submit herself to her husband.

The second area in which the New Testament specifically applies the principle of the headship of the man is in the church, particularly in the public exercise of the office of the keys. In I Corinthians 14 Paul enjoins women to “keep silence in the churches.” (v. 34) He readily concedes that women who have been speaking out may have done so out of a sincere desire to learn and to grow in grace and knowledge. But the apostle also directs this zeal so that it may show itself in the proper way. For women this means to “ask their husbands (or, ‘men’) at home” (v. 35)—and again it is the headship of the husband that dictates this. In chapter 11 Paul exhorted the women to continue wearing the veil in public worship in order to demonstrate a humble attitude.

So here in chapter 14 he directs the women to be silent and not to speak so that they continue “to be under obedience, as also saith the law.” (v. 34)

In I Timothy 2 Paul again emphasizes the headship of the man in the public ministry of the church. At the end of chapter two he again states that women are “to be in silence.” (v. 12) In this passage the apostle specifically forbids women “to teach,” that is, to interpret and to proclaim the Word publicly when she counters the headship of man. To do so would be “to usurp authority over the man,” for by the Word of God we rule and direct our lives. This would obviously violate the principle of the headship of man, so the women are asked to step back from this area of church work. In a desire to uphold that principle, they will “learn in silence with all subjection” (v. 11) when the men are involved.

As we read these words of Paul, we want to reflect faithfully what he says. In the passage from I Timothy 2, for example, we take special note of the basis on which the apostle asserts that a woman is not “to usurp authority over the man.” He makes this application on the basis of the principle established by the chronology of creation in Genesis 2. The fact that “Adam was first formed, then Eve” (v. 13) is not merely a statement of timing but an establishment of the principle of authority of man over against woman. He then adds a second reason that refers to the difference in the way man and woman fell into sin. He says that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” (v. 14) It is on the basis of the chronology of creation and the differing modes of the fall into sin that the Holy Ghost directs Paul to limit to men what we today know as the pastoral ministry. In faithfulness to His revelation we base our application on the clear statements of Scripture, on what the Spirit has specifically stated.

Just as we do not want to say any more than God has said, so we will not say less than He says in instructing us concerning His will. In Galatians 3:28 Paul reminds us that when it comes to the gift of salvation there are no distinctions whatsoever, neither racial nor social nor sexual. “Ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” he reassures us, letting us know that regardless of our standing before the world, we share fully in the forgiving grace of Christ. The most bereft or beggarly among men becomes a king and priest in the sight of God because of Christ’s transforming grace. While we rejoice in this Gospel proclamation, we do not assume that this description of the Gospel now sets aside the prescriptions of the moral law. Restored men and women will not discard the moral precepts as no longer applicable to their lives; they will turn to them to direct them in the way that is a delight to Him who has loved them so fully and faithfully. This is evident from passages such as Ephesians 5, for there Paul speaks of the husband-wife relationship in the most glorious of terms, comparing it to the relation between the heavenly Bridegroom, Christ, and His beloved, the church. At the same time, the apostle enjoins wives to submit themselves to their husbands in love. So also Peter exhorts believing wives to be submissive and holds up the holy women of the Old Testament as their examples.

IV. Conclusion

The principles that God sets down to direct men and women in their relationships with one another are all joy to us as Christians. We recognize that the willing observance of these principles flows out of the Gospel and finds its highest example in Him who is the very heart of the Gospel. In Christ submitting oneself becomes an act of serving God and a way of following Christ’s own pattern. In Christ exercising headship becomes

endued with the spirit of love and is transformed into a means of serving the needs of others. What is more, we Christians can delight in God's precepts since we recognize that through them God is directing us toward our own good. As we bend our wills to conform to God's will, we will experience true joy and satisfaction according to the new man.

In applying the principles God gives us for man-woman relationships, we seek to do so in a spirit of love and humility. Our concern is ever, "What is God saying to me?" Our constant concern is that our own conduct is in conformity with God's will. We learn this of men such as Paul, who does not seek to tell men how to make their wives more subject or women how to make their men show more Christ-like leadership. Paul speaks to men about the duties of man; and then he discusses with women what God asks of them. In this way he takes each person aside, as it were, and carefully instructs him in the will of God, confident that those who know and love Christ will delight in doing His will when it is known to them.

In faithfulness, to God's Word we want to reflect only the clear statements of God's inspired writers. The apostles were directed to make specific application of the principles we have been discussing only to two areas of the Christian life, marriage and the church. We cannot assume that we have the right to make specific applications of these principles to the roles men and women may fill in society. The sacred writers are silent when it comes to specific applications to life outside the home and church. In fact, in the examples of Deborah and Priscilla and Lydia we learn the wisdom of not making specific application to men and women in society. We want to make no statements beyond those which Scripture directs us to make. To do otherwise is to lose the dominical authority which must be behind every statement of the church if it is to be true to its sacred trust. Because Christians are the salt and light of the earth, however, they will strive according to the new man to give glory to God by honoring His principles before the world.

We will also want to remind one another that statements such as those that Paul sets before us in I Corinthians and I Timothy are not designed to limit women, but to direct them in a way that has God's blessing. The apostle gives us an important example when he repeatedly refers in his epistles to the works of love and service which various women have rendered to the Lord. through their labors in the church. Paul does exclude women from exercising the office of the keys publicly when such service would cause them to exercise authority over men. And yet, the apostle is just as quick to extol their works of faith in other areas and to exhort them to continue in such works. How blessed the church would be if we were to recapture that spirit of provoking one another to love and to good works!

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