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# Male and Female, Part II

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*This article completes the study of the biblical teaching concerning the structure of the male/female relationship commenced in Issue 17. The contemporary relevance of this subject and its potential influence hardly need to be stated given the current turmoil in the Church of England.*

## **Galatians 3:28**

This verse should not be overlooked because it is possibly the most quoted single verse of Scripture in this whole debate. It can be regarded as the slogan of the 'Christian Feminist' movement. The fact that there is "neither male nor female in Christ Jesus" is regarded as making it crystal clear that everything which distinguishes male and female and which can be obliterated, has been obliterated by Jesus Christ and the gracious freedom which He has brought. It is a verse, it is claimed, which, on the one hand, sets up a contrasting position with the OT in a retrospective fashion and, on the other, inaugurates something which is subsequently taken up in the NT.

Our consideration of Gen 1-3 has tried to show that Gal 3:28, or rather its perspective, does what is claimed only against the background of the Fall and not Creation. It remains for us to consider the NT material e.g. 1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:11-15, to see if that construction is borne out in these passages.

Before we can do that however we must do two things. The first is the use made of Gal 3:28. Is it a proper one or not? The second is the evaluation of the Gospel narratives which refer to our Lord's attitude to and conduct regarding women.

### **a) Gal 3:28 in Context**

Michael Griffiths says in 'The Role of Women', while warning people against being too dogmatic about Gen 2: "We can say that there is no necessary implication of the superiority or inferiority of either sex and this is borne out by the clear statements of the NT (Gal 3:28)."<sup>12</sup>

This begs the question 'Does Gal 3:28 of necessity abolish all inferiority/superiority distinctions?' (I am using the terminology chosen by opponents of the traditionalist position.) This question can only be answered by asking another question, viz. 'What was the point Paul was concerned to emphasise in Gal 3:28?'

It must be appreciated that it is not only male and female who are referred to in Gal 3:28. As Paul's conclusion applies to all referred to, it must apply to them all in precisely the same sense. It is therefore enough to ask whether all social distinctions were abolished between Christians who were slaves and Christians who were free, to answer the other question about distinctions

between male or female. To argue that as Christianity secured the abolition of slavery so it works to obliterate headship is analogically false. The parallel to slavery as an institution is marriage. Would we say that marriage should be abolished as slavery was?

What Paul is emphasising, of course, in Gal 3:28 and Col 3:10-11, is that whatever sex, religion, nationality, status or anything else a person may be is no barrier to God's grace being given and received, and that grace puts them all equally in Christ. Gal 3:22 speaks of all being under sin; 3:26 speaks of all becoming children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. This introduces a new dimension and reality which alters their attitudes to each other but it does not obliterate all distinctions. It introduces a new element which transcends but does not destroy.

### **b) The Gospel Records**

The attitude and conduct of the Lord to women as presented in the Gospel narratives is an important factor in the debate over male-female relationships in the Bible. The relevant data are not in dispute. The setting of these passages against the background of first century Judaism is also common ground in the debate and such a study highlights the distinctiveness of the Lord's words and acts on this matter. What could be more different from the Jew who thanked God daily that he had not been born a heathen, a slave or a woman, or from the rabbi who declared that for a father to teach his daughter the law was equivalent to teaching her lechery, than the Lord calling female disciples His sisters and commending Mary for sitting at His feet to hear His word? All this is commonly accepted and delighted in by representatives of both positions being considered.

Where the divide opens up is at the point where our Lord's approach is associated with the OT. It is possible to see what the Lord was doing as a protest and conviction of rabbinic distortion of marriage and denigration of women which Gen 3:16b anticipates and therefore a return to the position described in Gen 1 and 2. On the other hand, it is viewed as an abrogation of all male rule in the light of Gen 3:16 and a return to Gen 1, Gen 2 having been interpreted as not supporting any differentiation of role. Is the Lord opposing male tyranny, i.e. Gen 3:16, and how it was exemplified in His day or extolling mutual submission and equality, i.e. Gen 1 and 2, and how that is understood and exemplified in our day, or extolling mutual submission and equality?

This might seem to amount to a distinction without a difference so perhaps an illustration or an example of the distinction being worked out will help. The example is our Lord's choice of twelve males for His disciples on the one hand (Lk 6:13-16), and on the other the reference to women who accompanied and supported Him and His disciples as they itinerated (Lk 8:1-3). Howard Marshall regards the former as an act done "under the constraint of what was socially acceptable" and the latter as suggesting "a trajectory pointing in a very different direction from that of orthodoxy ... the first step towards a fuller sharing by women in the service of Christ."<sup>13</sup> The basis for that evaluation, it seems to me, is an incorrect reading of Gen 2 in the light of Gen 1, and a dismissal of the OT record of God's choice of males for the

priesthood to represent other males as well as females as **but** cultural. Why can we not regard what these women in Lk 8 did as the striking but spontaneous response of love to the Lord and no more? To do this sets up no contradiction with 1 Tim 2:11ff.

## **1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11-15**

The first two texts listed above have marriage and the home in view and the other two, the Church, or one aspect of the Church's life. However, they can all be bracketed because in one way or another they refer to the elements of headship and submission as structuring the male-female relationships in both settings. These verses form the crux of the debate. Their teaching (together with that of Peter in 1 Peter 3:1ff.) should settle this matter because, in all cases, apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ are speaking authoritatively. But this is not the case.

Two ways of interpreting these passages need to be referred to. In both the hierarchical element in male-female relationships is denied.

The first of these is associated with the name of Paul K. Jewett. In his book entitled 'Man as Male and Female'<sup>14</sup> he posits a flat contradiction between Gal 3:28 and the passages now under consideration. In the former, Jewett sees Paul the Christian and the apostle of Jesus Christ while in the latter, Saul, the rabbinic chauvinist, re-asserts himself. Jewett proceeds to dismiss the latter and the teaching of those related texts. As exegesis, this is a measure of despair, namely to posit such a flat contradiction in the mind of an author which he was himself unaware of, but it is valuable in that Jewett and others do appreciate that Paul does teach headship and submission. But notwithstanding they declare his teaching to be cultural and contradictory of Christianity.

Secondly, the stronger and most popular case for an anti-hierarchical interpretation of Paul's teaching which Evangelicals are presenting follows a different line. Whereas Jewett sees headship and submission against a rabbinic background and dismisses it, these scholars see these passages as set against a hellenistic background and they interpret them accordingly. Culture is an important element here.

We shall consider this approach to the passages listed and do so under the following headings: Paul and Male Headship; Paul and Female Submission.

### **1) Paul and Male Headship**

The nub of the issue here is whether Paul includes the idea of **rule** (to be described later) in his use of the term 'head' in 1 Cor 11:23 and Eph 5:23 or whether by this word he **only** means 'source' or 'origin'. Does 'head' mean 'head over' or 'head of' i.e. the head of a river?

Etymologically, a case can be made out for each alternative. If 'head' is considered in terms of classical Greek then the idea of source comes to the fore. But in Paul's time, i.e. post-Septuagint, 'head' stood for the Hebrew *rosh* which contains the element of authority. James Hurley in his magisterial

work 'Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective'<sup>15</sup> writes: "Head was used in first century Greek as a synonym for the more common words for ruler (*archon*) and for source (*arche*)". He continues: "To say that a man is head of woman may thus be to say that he is her origin (i.e. her beginning is in him) or to say that he is in a position of authority with respect to her. These various meanings are of course not mutually exclusive. We must therefore ask, on each occasion of its use, which sense of head is intended. We must be prepared to accept the possibility of two or three meanings being applicable simultaneously."<sup>16</sup>

It follows that what is often said by egalitarians against those who hold a traditional position is not true. Michael Griffiths puts it as follows: "The difficulty here is to disengage that section of our thinking which attributes twentieth century English language connotations to 'head' when trying to understand what the Bible says."<sup>17</sup>

Without denying that we have problems in looking as we should at what we read, what Hurley makes clear is that there is a problem **in the text**. He is much more sound and helpful than Griffiths in saying that the question about the meaning of *kephale* (head) "must be answered from the context and from analogy in other Pauline writings"<sup>18</sup>.

What then does 'head' mean in 1 Cor 11 and Eph 5? James Hurley has drawn attention to a most striking fact from a study of Paul's 'head-body' language elsewhere in the New Testament, i.e. Col 1 and 2 and Eph 4. He says: "It is significant that in those passages which clearly use 'head' (*kephale*) to mean 'source' Paul does not introduce marital imagery. In passages in which he does use 'head' as 'head over' he uses the head language to illustrate the marital relationship."<sup>19</sup>

From this datum he draws the conclusion that head means 'head over' in 1 Cor 11 and Eph 5 (the first two texts in our list). To this can be added the fact that Paul does not use the term 'head' when he is speaking explicitly about origins, vide 1 Cor 11:8 and 1 Tim 2:13. On 1 Cor 11:3 Hurley writes: "If 'head' means 'source' in 1 Cor 11:3 Paul's parallelism is poor and he virtually teaches that God made Christ ... but if 'head' means 'head over' a set of parallels can be established ... (which) is self-consistent and does not do violence to either Pauline or other New Testament theology."<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand he shows that "There is no way to construct a satisfactory set of parallels if we take 'head' to mean 'source' in 1 Cor 11:3."<sup>21</sup> (By 'satisfactory' Hurley means a view which satisfies the rejection of Arianism.)

In answer to taking 'head' as 'head over' and apart from the culture question, Michael Griffiths writes: "We are ... told that the head of Christ is God (1 Cor 11:3) where we know that the Persons of the Trinity are equal and that 'head' in this sense cannot mean that one party is 'greater' than the other."<sup>22</sup> But Paul is not here speaking of the Trinity but of Christ and did not He say, "My Father is **greater** than I"? (John 14:28). In what direction does a refusal to say that point?

It remains of course to consider what kind of headship the Christian husband

has and how he should exercise it. In describing, or rather misrepresenting this, the egalitarians use the terms 'superiority' and 'inferiority'. These are fair terms to use of the post Gen 3:16 situation but not of the Genesis 1 and 2 arrangement. They are certainly a world apart from Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3, passages in which Christian husbands are directed how to act as 'heads' towards their wives.

The husband's headship role is to be conditioned by three factors. The first of these is that both husband and wife are creatures made in the image of God and "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7). They are therefore **equally** beloved children of the same heavenly Father, brother and sister in the Lord and His redeemed servants. The second is that the wife is "a weaker vessel". This reality is a crucial factor in the debate. It is more often dismissed on the basis that women are capable of performing physical and intellectual tasks no less demanding than those which men have to face. But this will not do as exegesis. One way of looking at the expression is to note that its context refers to slaves and suffering and so the reference could be to the woman's subordinate position coupled with a kind of frailty (emotional?) which is peculiarly hers.

The third is the reference to Christ's love for the Church which is to be the pattern for the husband's headship role towards his wife. It is the example of undertaking a responsibility and the giving of oneself to her in love. The husband is to rule in love rather than to love to rule.

John Stott writes: "Headship definitely implies some kind of 'authority' to which 'submission' is necessary ... I suggest that the word 'responsibility' conveys more accurately the kind of headship Paul envisages ... it is a headship more of care than control, more of responsibility than of authority."<sup>23</sup>

## **2) Paul and Female Submission**

There are two factors to be considered here, namely the general one of submission and the particular one of women being prohibited from speaking or teaching in the church.

### **The Duty of Submission**

The teaching of the apostles, Paul and Peter, on this matter is not only quite clear but is expressed in terms which are distinctively Christian. The submission of wives is declared to be "fitting in the Lord" (Col 3:18). It is something which is highly valued by the Lord (1 Pet 3:4). It is to be given to husbands by wives "as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22) and it is to be an illustration of the Church's submission to Christ (Eph 5:24).

It is not true that the same word is used to describe the submission of wives to husbands (*hupotasso*) on the one hand and children to parents, slaves to masters (*hupakouo*) on the other. This together with what has been noted above points in the direction of wives' submission being of a distinctive kind.

If the difference in words is important for meaning, then it should be noted that the term Paul uses to describe a wife's submission is the term which Peter uses for the submission required by a state of its citizens.

The term is a derivative from a verb meaning ‘to arrange, put or place’. A preposition is prefixed to it which means ‘under’. The meaning of the verb used is ‘to arrange or put under’, i.e. wives under husbands. God has made this arrangement and has done so for a purpose. Subordination is a useful term here. Its meaning is far removed from subjugation. The latter implies force; the former implies a framework or a frame for working, i.e. husband and wife together. The husband is responsible for providing a framework in which the capable, distinctive but tender, even vulnerable, femininity of the wife may flourish and be protected in every sphere, the church included — just as rulers are to govern for the good of citizens.

The argument which is presented against submission rests on two grounds. First, Eph 5:21 is pointed out in which **all** are exhorted to submit to each other. Secondly the notion of full equality and complementarity is invoked. On this basis people speak of the relation between husband and wife as being one of mutual submission in service after the example of Christ. By this pincer movement the singularity of the command of Eph 5:22 is undermined.

The answers to this approach are well given by James Hurley. In the first place, he points out that this relation between Eph 5:21 and 5:22 is not as construed above. Verse 21 is a bridge verse laying down a general pattern for Spirit-filled Christian behaviour. This is then broken down and Paul indicates how it is to work itself out in the three kinds of relationships, namely marital, parental, social. That wives are to submit to husbands is not contradicted by the fact that all are to submit to each other but is a particular exemplification of it.

Secondly, the verb used does not mean “submit to the needs of, i.e. serve”, but “make yourselves subject to”. Hurley says: “If the debated use in Eph 5:21 is held aside, there is no example at all of the partner being asked to submit himself to the subordinate. Conversely, the subordinate is always so asked. The idea of bending to meet the needs of a stronger or weaker partner in a relationship is present throughout discussions of relations involving subordination, but other words than ‘submit’ are used for the partner to whom submission is due. That partner, be it God, a husband, a parent, the state or master is never asked to submit to the subordinate.”<sup>24</sup>

The verb ‘submit’ always implies an element of authority which is to be required and responded to. It is used of all Christians in Eph 5:21 because they are over one another in the Lord.

### **The Prohibition on Speaking**

This is probably the most sensitive area of all and we will consider it from a study of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 because it is the stronger statement and is full of some of the problems associated with 1 Cor 14:34-35.

In 1 Tim 2:11-12 Paul contrasts two positions, namely learning quietly and submissively on the one hand and teaching on the other. The former he commands; the latter he forbids. The reasons which he gives for this veto are first, the priority of man’s creation and secondly, the fact that the woman, Eve, was deceived. Three questions arise, namely ‘What is teaching?’, ‘Why

may women not teach?', which involves asking 'What is the connection between priority in creation and teaching on the one hand and being deceived and not teaching on the other?' We shall consider these in turn.

### **What is Teaching?**

The structure of this passage indicates that "Quiet learning inversely parallels (verbal) teaching and full submission inversely parallels exercising authority."<sup>25</sup>

This means that the teaching in view is authorised, i.e. it is the teaching of those appointed by Christ to teach in His church. As 1 Tim 3 makes clear this is associated with the office of eldership from which women are barred.

### **Why may Women not Teach?**

First of all this is because of man's priority in creation as stated in 1 Tim 3:13. Priority is related to primogeniture. The first formed supplies the pattern for the firstborn to whom belonged not only a double share of the inheritance but also, on his father's death, his position of leadership. This supplies the link between priority and teaching — the former is connected with leadership which is denied to women in the church and in the home.

This receives confirmation from the fact that in 1 Cor 11 it is only man who is described as "the image and glory of God" (v 7). This is because of what 'head' means in this passage. To man as male the sovereign God gave leadership and he glorifies God as he exercises it. Woman is man's glory (v 7), that is, she glorifies him as she submits to his leading. She is not termed 'head' in 1 Cor 11 and so being under a head is not to act as if she were a 'head' by engaging in authorised teaching in the church.

Secondly, it is connected not only with Creation but with the Fall. The woman was deceived not the man. Paul is not here excusing Adam, elsewhere he blames him as if there were no Eve (Rom 5), nor is he blaming Eve for the Fall, but just stating a fact. Eve was deceived. Adam was not. What is the significance of this? Is it that, as created, Eve was prone to deception? This, I think, is difficult to square with Eve's being made in the image and likeness of God as was Adam. I think that the explanation lies in the fact that she was more likely to be deceived because God had not spoken personally to her as He did to Adam. She learned of God's provision and the prohibition from Adam. She was therefore not so impressed by the word of God as Adam was when God spoke to **him**. She should therefore have consulted her 'head' instead of conversing with Satan. Doing the latter she was deceived. On this interpretation the prohibition on a woman teaching is related not so much to some innate weakness and proneness to be deceived but is a judgement on her for having exalted herself over her head.

This leads to the word translated "usurp authority" in the Authorised Version of 1 Tim 2:12. By egalitarians the word is understood to mean the illegitimate assumption of authority or its ill-becoming use, i.e. being proud or domineering. Provided the latter is avoided women may be allowed to teach alone or in a team ministry. Howard Marshall and John Stott<sup>26</sup> argue in this way, the latter excluding women from the presbyterate or episcopate as ruling

is forbidden to them.

The meaning of this term (*authentain*) is not as easily established along this line as some might want others to think. The verb can mean to exercise authority and so regarded it is a synonymous expression for “to teach” in 1 Tim 2:12. However such teaching is done, for a woman to do it is to elevate herself above her head which is forbidden.

Those are the passages of Scripture which lie at the heart of this debate. It is hoped that this survey will indicate where the disagreements between Evangelicals lie. Their resolution among us is not easy. Though evangelicalism is not (yet) as deeply divided over this as Anglicanism and ecumenical progress is really impeded at this point, it would be a mistake to minimise the difference among us and its bearing on evangelical unity.

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## References

The numbering of these references is continuous with the sequence begun in Part I, Issue 17, pp.35-41.

12. THE ROLE OF WOMEN, p.100, ed. Shirley Lees, IVP, 1984.
13. THE ROLE OF WOMEN, pp.179,180.
14. MAN AS MALE AND FEMALE, P.K. Jewett, Eerdmans, 1975.
15. MAN AND WOMAN IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE, J.B. Hurley, IVP, 1981.
16. Ibid., Hurley, op.cit., pp.164 and 165.
17. THE ROLE OF WOMEN, p.106.
18. Hurley, op.cit., p.165.
19. Hurley, op.cit., p.166.
20. Hurley, op.cit., pp.166 and 167.
21. Hurley, op.cit., p.166.
22. THE ROLE OF WOMEN, p.106.
23. ISSUES FACING CHRISTIANS TODAY, J. Stott, Marshalls, 1984, p.246.
24. Hurley, op.cit., p.143.
25. Hurley, op.cit., p.201.
26. John Stott in ISSUES FACING CHRISTIANS TODAY and Howard Marshall in THE ROLE OF WOMEN.

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*It is a mistake of method to relativize biblical teaching to the cultural axioms, assumptions and paradigms of this or any age. Scripture discloses the work, ways and will of the unchanging Creator in relation to mankind as such, and all human opinion regarding values, priorities, and duties must be judged and where necessary corrected by reference to this disclosure. Every culture, being an expression of the corporate goals of fallen mankind, has a distorting, smothering, and blunting effect on the biblical truths which, if applied, would change it, and to keep those truths in shape, free from compromising assimilation to the cultural status quo, is never easy.*

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