

Subordination and headship: A case study in Lutheran hermeneutics

Tanya Wittwer

The usual starting point for the application of Biblical hermeneutics is a specific passage of scripture. As we prepare to preach from a pericope set down for a particular Sunday, we will draw on the principles and methods developed within hermeneutics, and the resources of our theological heritage and tradition. Our aim in doing so is to faithfully interpret this ancient text to hear God's voice speaking today.

When the starting point is instead an issue that has arisen in our life together, while the aim is unchanged, the hermeneutical process necessarily takes a different direction. This case study illustrates that process.

As part of a discussion regarding the prevention of domestic violence within our church community, the 2015 Synodical Convention of the LCA passed a resolution requesting that a study be made of 'the Lutheran theological and scriptural understanding of subordination and the role of male headship in marriage ...'.¹ The words 'subordination' and 'headship' in the resolution immediately give a different frame to the study than if the question was phrased, for example, in terms of examining a Biblical view of marriage, or intimate relationships. They point to specific texts where current translations use these words regarding the relationship between women and men (Eph 5:22-23 and 1 Cor 11:3). Historically, from Chrysostom through Luther, Calvin, and Henry to commentaries of the 1950s there was little variation in the interpretation of these and other verses.² They have been understood to teach that women are a subordinate class of humanity, more prone to sin and imaging God in a lesser way than men,³ and used to affirm a hierarchal relationship between men and women in marriage.

However, to explore a Lutheran theological and scriptural understanding of any issue, rather than beginning with particular texts, it is essential to examine the broader sweep of Scripture regarding the topic.⁴ To do otherwise is to risk the selective use of texts and

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- 1 Lutheran Church of Australia. Synodical Convention. 2015. Resolution 20150209. 'Resolved: that Synod request CTICR study the Lutheran theological and scriptural understanding of subordination and the role of male headship in marriage and the contextual implications for family violence.'
 - 2 Genesis 3; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:14.
 - 3 Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 154.
 - 4 A. Skevington Wood, 'Luther's principles of Biblical interpretation,' in *The Principles of Biblical Interpretation: As Enunciated by Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967).

eisegesis to support a pre-existing belief. In the interpretation of any Scriptural text for what it might say regarding our life together we are seeking to be faithful to God, God's mission, and God's intention for humanity; looking at submission and headship will therefore be within the context of the Biblical witness regarding the relationship between men and women, particularly within marriage.

Having first examined the landscape of the issue, we can then return to the two passages that mention headship and subordination, to examine them in the light of the overall themes and also within the immediate context of the passages themselves (the *scopus* of the text). In doing this we will be seeking the 'plain meaning' of the text. The plain or literal meaning, according to Luther, is found by looking at the grammatical-literary features and the historical setting of the text⁵ and Braaten further explains: 'Christian theology is always a human attempt to understand the Christian faith in the light on our knowledge of its historical origins and the challenges of the contemporary period.'⁶ In our interpretive task it is also important to remember that 'each particular text or section of the Bible should be used for its main emphasis, not for its attendant features.'⁷

The Lutheran hermeneutical lens

The synodical resolution requested that the study seek a 'Lutheran theological and scriptural understanding' of the issue. The core of Lutheran theology is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone. The core of a Lutheran hermeneutic is that we read and interpret the Bible in the light of God's free gift of grace.⁸ This tradition therefore leads us to begin a Biblical overview of the key themes regarding women and men in Scripture, not with the Hebrew Scriptures, but with words regarding men and women in the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Our emphasis on God's grace keeps reminding us that none of us is capable of saving ourselves, none of us can do or be anything that makes us closer to God or God's righteousness, and by clear implication, there is no Biblical reason for any one group of people claiming superiority over another group of people. We are reconciled with God through Christ and have all been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18).

5 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis, MI: Concordia, 1958), 231; cf. p. 252; 2:189; 3: 353.

6 Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 1.

7 Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983).

8 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck, vol. 15, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 199. It has often been said that Law and Gospel are key hermeneutical tools, but the focus of Luther's distinction between the functions of law and gospel in Scripture is for preaching and pastoral care, rather than development of theology. This is in line with his understanding that Scripture is 'less a source of information than a tool for the Holy Spirit's work.' Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, Christian theology in context, ed. Timothy Gorringer, Serene Jones, and Graham Ward, (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2009), 48.

The living out of Joel's proleptic vision in Acts 2⁹ points to the eschatological dimension of Galatians 3:28, said by some¹⁰ to be the summary of the key message of all of Galatians. Paul proclaims, 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' Here the words of Genesis 1:27 are echoed and remind us that all of humanity is created in the image of God, and all of humanity is commissioned to care for the world. Galatians 3:28 'refers to the *adiaphorisation* of sex difference in a new creation where being male or female is no advantage or disadvantage in relation to God and others, and where man and woman are reconciled and united as equals.'¹¹

Galatians 3:28 assists us to recognise that patriarchy is part of the sinful distortion of God's creation. It is named as such in Genesis 3:16, where one of the descriptive phrases of the damaging effects of sin on human life is that 'he shall rule over you.'

Hebrew Scriptures / Old Testament

The Hebrew Scriptures 'take for granted the idea that a patriarchal society—where men are the visible authority structure—is how life is.'¹² However the creation accounts, particularly as seen through the lens of the New Testament theme of reconciliation (to which we will return), may be considered foundational when examining the relationship between men and women.

In the Priestly account, '*adam*, the earthling or groundling, is created "in the image of God ... male and female (Gen 1:27)."¹³ Equal man and woman (or, perhaps, representatives of humanity in all its variation) were called into being by the Creator.¹⁴ Together they are blessed and together they are charged with stewardship of the earth (1:28).

- 9 Acts 2:16-18: 'No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."
- 10 E.g. Douglas J Moo, *Galatians*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 3:28. Douglas A. Campbell, 'Reconciliation in Paul: The gospel of negation and transcendence in Galatians 3:28,' in *The Theory of Reconciliation*, ed. C.E. Gunton (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 47, 49, 50.
- 11 Judith M. Gundry-Volf, 'Beyond difference? Paul's vision of a new humanity in Galatians 3:28,' in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 8.
- 12 Jenni Williams, *God Remembered Rachel* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 2014), 128.
- 13 Luther asserts that the in the original creation male and female were equal, but he draws on monastic and mystical tradition to claim that in the fall it was the nature of woman, not the system of relationships, that was corrupted. Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol 1, 115. Genesis 2:18.
- 14 The phrase 'male and female' need not be seen to preclude from God's imaging those whose bodies do not fit the binary proto-type, any more than other parts of the day are not precluded from the day by the phrase 'and it was evening and it was morning.' This verse also assists the realisation that whatever noun or pronoun we have for God is metaphorical, and assigning human attributes, including gender, is only at the metaphorical level.

The older Yahwist creation account situates the creation of the man and the woman in a relationship context. 'It is not good that the man/human should be alone; I will make a helper as his partner (Gen 2:18).' There is no implication of power imbalance in the term 'helper.'

The importance of the helper to the one helped may be gleaned from the fact that twice in the Psalms (30:10 and 54:4) God is presented as such a helper ('ezer) of humans. The equality of the partners in this helping relationship is underscored. Male and female are 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh (2:23); they have the same strengths and the same weaknesses and the myth asserts that it is precisely because of their equality and, therefore, potential intimacy that male and female may marry.¹⁵

The two differing accounts evoke an image of marriage which is both a living-working-community (*koinonia*) and site of intimacy/fertility.

Beyond the shared innocence in the garden, it is clear that the Old Testament approach to marriage, family and sexuality was syncretistic, accepting different kinds of marriage in different places and times in line with broader cultural shifts. 'Biblical Hebrew does not have a noun "marriage" or a verb 'to marry' ... instead the texts speak of a man "taking" or "having" a woman.'¹⁶ Much that is written regarding women and marriage is culturally bound to the extent that it is difficult to find relevance today. As noted above, the relationship pattern that is seen in much of the Hebrew Scriptures, patriarchy, is not the created order but the result of human disobedience: 'he shall rule over you' (Gen 3:16).¹⁷ 'The dominant characteristic of patriarchy is that it describes women in relation to men and in ways that serve and further men's interests.'¹⁸ In the literary context of Genesis 3:15, the pattern of male-domination is one of those features of post-Fall existence which are to be overcome.¹⁹

Many of the passages that might on first glance be thought to have relevance to a discussion of the relationship between men and women in marriage are about sexual expression. The 'sex texts' within the book of Deuteronomy pertain to property, and those

15 Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 17, 18.

16 Carolyn Pressler, 'The "Biblical view" of marriage,' in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 202.

17 Intriguingly, the Yahwist creation account notes a Matrilocal system of family relationship (Genesis 2:24).

18 Salzman and Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology*, 14.

19 'This interpretation is evident if we see that the judgment oracle of Genesis 3 has a two-part structure, the first part being 3:13-16 and the second 3:17-19. ... each part contains an indictment, a curse, a description of the outworking of the curse, and a statement of "overcoming" that curse.' Junia Pokrifka, 'Patriarchy, Biblical authority, and the grand narrative of the Old Testament,' in *Tamar's Tears*, ed. Andrew Sloan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 289 n 50.

within Leviticus to purity concerns.²⁰ Judith Wegener's exegetical work concludes that 'the personhood of women is defined according to their relationship to men and they are treated as chattel whenever their biological function is concerned.'²¹

Within Hebrew culture 'sexuality is not divinised. There is no god-goddess couple;'²² this was a basic difference between Israel and the cultures that surrounded and often engulfed it. Biblical mandates for marriage shifted according to the need of the time and as influenced by the surrounding cultures.²³ In relation to marriage and procreation there is much in the Hebrew Scriptures that we find problematic: polygyny, polycoity, concubinage, levirate marriage, the taking of women of conquered peoples. The value of women is according to their identification as the property of men and bearers of heirs.

Despite the variety of models of marriage present in the Old Testament, the creation account and wisdom literature appear to 'advocate, or at least would seem to presuppose, faithful monogamy (Prov 5:15-20; 18:22; 31:10-31; Song of Sol).'²⁴ In the Hebrew Scriptures divorce is rarely mentioned. The protection of women appears to be the basis for those laws that do exist to prevent divorce or regarding regulations after divorce,²⁵ and divorce is seen as falling short of God's ideal (Mal 2:13-16). The control of marriage and divorce was not part of Israel's civil law, but within the jurisdiction of the head of the household.²⁶

Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea all use the metaphor of marriage to describe the connection between God and God's people (e.g. Isa 54:5, 62:4b-5, Jer 2:2, and Hos 2:16; 19-20). The ontological difference between God and Israel makes the application of the metaphor to human relationships problematic. Hosea demonstrates additional difficulties with the metaphor because, despite the generosity of God, promising eternal righteousness, goodness and faithfulness (Hos 2:21-22) there is the threat of violence, humiliation, isolation and the withholding of necessities (2:3) along with the assumption that Israel will submit to God's will. In Jeremiah 3:8 and Isaiah 50:1, divorce is the punishment for Israel's faithlessness. It is difficult to retroject the marriage analogy onto relationships between human partners.

20 Deborah L. Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 4-5. Texts considered include: Leviticus 15:18, 24, 33b; 18; 19:20-22, 19:29; 20:10-21; 21. Deuteronomy 5:18; 21:10-14; 22:13-23.a; 24:1-4; 25:5-10; 27:20-23; 28.30.

21 Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19. Summarised by Katie Jean McCoy, 'Old Testament laws concerning particular female personhood and their implications for the dignity of women' (PhD dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 10.

22 Salzman and Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology*, 16.

23 E.g. Deuteronomy 23:3; Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-31; cf Ruth 4 & Matthew 1:5.

24 Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 330.

25 Deuteronomy 22:28-29; 24:1-4.

26 Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 331.

Many feminist scholars declare that patriarchy so permeates the Hebrew Scriptures that they cannot speak to relationships between people today. The point of Proverbs 31:10-31, about the capable wife, for example, is not to extol the strong independent woman, but to highlight her virtue as enhancing her husband's reputation (v. 23).

There are, however, scholars who believe that the Old Testament can point beyond patriarchy or even that women are elevated rather than denigrated in the OT.²⁷ Many of the legal rights for women can be seen as intending to enhance their humanity within the patriarchal system. Many of the matriarchs act decisively and with initiative. That Hannah (1 Sam 1) and Rahab (Josh 2) are presented as the embodiment of faithful Israel disrupts the androcentric view, and Ruth and the woman of Shunem (2 Kgs 4:8-37) subvert patriarchy. Esther and Deborah provide significant leadership. The story of Bathsheba who intercedes for Solomon with the aging David (1 Kgs 1:11-31) is an example of the 'integration, connection and involvement of royal women in various activities and decisions of the royal house' with no distinctions drawn between private influence and public policy.²⁸ She is one of the royal women who are mothers, daughters or wives of royal men but are not necessarily directed by them;²⁹ specifically, the Queen Mother is counsellor to the king and her people³⁰ in a context where political and trade alliances relied on familial rather than patriarchal relationships.

To apply the principal of interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture through the lens of the gospel means stepping back to take a larger view, in order to see the thread of God's liberating mission. Rather than looking at discrete stories or personalities, Pokrifka points out that the metanarrative gives us a clearer framework for how women, including women within marriage, can be viewed.³¹ This metanarrative:

*'retains a place for the weakness and vulnerability of all humanity before God's unique mystery and power' and is 'marked by ethical features that militate against its being used for the oppression of one group by another. These characteristics include God typically siding with the oppressed and against the powerful, frequent denunciations against oppressors, and statements of intended redemptive outcomes (even for oppression and suffering) that are global in scope.'*³²

27 Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Hendrickson: Peabody, MA, 2007), 294.

28 Elna K. Solvang, *A Woman's Place Is in the House* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 154.

29 *Ibid.*, 173.

30 *Ibid.*, 74.

31 Junia Pokrifka, 'Patriarchy, Biblical authority, and the grand narrative of the Old Testament,' 275.

32 *Ibid.*

New Testament

According to the Gospel writers, Jesus affirmed the commandment against adultery, extending it to prohibit divorce³³ and to bring greater accountability to men³⁴ thereby removing a moral double standard and providing protection for women within marriage.

Apart from the teaching on adultery and divorce, the Gospel accounts record little that Jesus said regarding marriage, and nothing directly about the relationship between husband and wife. His attendance at the wedding at Cana and his quotations from Genesis³⁵ are viewed as affirmation of marriage. Other references to marriage or wedding feasts have meanings not connected with this issue of the relationship between husband and wife,³⁶ except that marriage relationships are confined to life on earth, not heaven.³⁷ Neither is there anything Jesus is recorded as saying regarding women, beyond his protests about the exploitation of widows.³⁸

It is Jesus' overarching message and actions rather than specific words that can be used to gain a picture of what the early church remembered or chose to pass on regarding Jesus and women. He joins the prophets in proclamation of vindication of the poor and oppressed in the coming reign of God. The inclusive graciousness and goodness of God is illustrated repeatedly in the parables. Jesus turns the Messianic image from that of a triumphant king to that of a servant, 'reversing the social references of divine redemptive activity.'³⁹ Calling God 'Abba,' he says that no one is to call another 'Rabbi,' 'Father,' or 'Instructor.'⁴⁰ Torrance summarises this passage, stating that Jesus' approach here is 'there should be no application of the same language both to God and humanity in such a way as to risk endorsing human hierarchies and the oppression that can attend these.'⁴¹ Instead, our relationship to God removes the stratified relationships and brings us into family as brothers and sisters, serving each other.

In stories of Jesus' healing/saving interventions, women are often representative of people that have no honour within the society: a widow, a 'sinner,' the Samaritan woman, the ritually unclean, the woman threatened with stoning.⁴² That he notices, listens to and speaks to them and responds to their needs demonstrates the challenge to societal privilege and domination. Further clues to Jesus' lack of regard for patriarchal

33 Matthew 5:30,31; Matthew 9:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

34 Matthew 5:28 cf. Deuteronomy 21:11.

35 Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, quoted in Mark 10:6-8.

36 Matthew 22:2-14; Matthew 25:1-13, Luke 12:36-38, where the wedding feast is a metaphor for the sovereignty of God.

37 Matthew 22:24-32; Mark 12:19-25; Luke 20:28-37.

38 Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.

39 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 120.

40 Matthew 23:1-12.

41 Alan J. Torrance, "'Call no man father!'" The Trinity, patriarchy and God-talk,' in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 192-3.

42 Luke 7:11-16; Luke 7:36-50; John 4:7-29; Mark 5:25; John 7:53-8:11.

relationships lie in his redefinition of family. Following Jesus creates both dissension in families, and new family bonds and kinship relationships.⁴³

It is clear that Jesus included women in his apostolic community. Multiple sources attest to women who, unchaperoned, follow Jesus, witness key events in his life and provide for Jesus and his followers.⁴⁴ The women are both married and single, from a range of life stations.⁴⁵ Meier states that while no individual woman is named as a disciple, 'the most probably conclusion is that Jesus viewed and treated these women as disciples.'⁴⁶ We are told of the depth of relationship Jesus had with both women and men.⁴⁷ According to Matthew, Mark and John, women were the ones to whom Jesus first appeared after the resurrection⁴⁸ and in Luke 24 they are among those charged by Jesus to be witnesses to the resurrection and forgiveness of sins.⁴⁹

None of these things by themselves give clear interpretive guidelines for Jesus' attitude to relationships between men and women in marriage, but together they build a picture of his respect and regard for women as well as for men.

At the birth of what we understand as the church, the prophecy of Joel is seen to be fulfilled, where daughters as well as sons will prophecy and the Holy Spirit fall on women and men.⁵⁰

The early church remembered the proclamation of the resurrection by women, and in the early congregations we see the active ministry of women such as Phillip's daughters, Priscilla and Junia.⁵¹ Unlike the Gospels, Acts uses 'disciples' for both men and women.⁵² It is apparent that Paul supported the leadership of women, including in the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, Cenchreae and Rome.

Clearly gender is not an issue in bearing God's image, in being baptised and receiving the Holy Spirit, in discipleship, prophecy or proclamation. We all share the ministry of reconciliation. But these references also reveal the role of women in God's economy. Using a gospel lens for interpreting the New Testament means taking a forward-looking

43 Luke 14:26; Mark 10:29,30; Matthew 10:35-38, 12:46-50.

44 E.g. Mark 15:40-41; Matthew 27:55-56; Luke 23:49 in conjunction with 8:2-3.

45 Luke 8:3; Luke 7:37.

46 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew Volume 3: Companions and Competitors* (New York: ABRL Doubleday, 2001), 80.

47 John 11:5.

48 Matthew 28:9,10; Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18.

49 Luke 24:33b, 47-53.

50 Acts 2:17, 18.

51 Acts 21:9; Romans 16:5; Romans 16:7.

52 E.g. Acts 9:1-2.

eschatological, proleptic perspective.⁵³ The new heart and new Spirit promised in the Hebrew scriptures⁵⁴ is consummated in the Christ event. Paul writes, in 2 Corinthians, 'From now on ... we regard no one from a human point of view... If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!'⁵⁵ The passage goes on to speak of our ministry of reconciliation in the light of the reconciliation God offers through Christ.

Relationships within the community are those of humble servanthood:

'... be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ... Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!' (Phil 2:5-8)

Christians are not called to exert power over one another, but are called to mutual service.

Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12–14, and Ephesians 4:11-16 all speak of the gifting of the spirit in diverse ways to men and women, to be exercised within the congregation as an integrated whole. Many other texts could be cited regarding mutuality in relationships, including from Colossians 3, speaking to the community of their new life in Christ, including bearing with one another (13), to let peace rule (15) and with the word of Christ dwelling in each, to teach and admonish one another (16).

Pauline theology 'saw a necessary relationship between creation, redemption/resurrection, and human destiny in the future. That is, Paul believed that through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, God began to reverse the fall and work towards the restoration of creation, which will be completed at Christ's second coming.'⁵⁶ Galatians 3:28 has already been cited for its clarity regarding the relationships between people in Christ. Colossians 3:10 and 2 Corinthians 3:10 reinforce the message that *all* believers are being renewed in knowledge in the image of their creator.

Ephesians 5:21-35 specifically addresses relationships within marriage. It is written, as are all the New Testament books, into a cultural setting of a strict hierarchy of

53 Campbell suggests that the eschatological discussion in 'chapters 5-8 in Romans can legitimately be viewed as an extended discussion of the theological programme that Paul pithily summarises in Galatians 3:26-28.' Douglas A. Campbell, 'The logic of eschatology: The implications of Paul's gospel for gender as suggested by Galatians 3.28a in context,' in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 77.

54 E.g. Ezekiel 36:26.

55 2 Corinthians 5:16, 17.

56 Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 143.

relationships,⁵⁷ however it starts with the radical notion that within marriage, each partner is subject to the other. To grow in self-giving, Christ-like love is the goal of marriage. Further, Paul's understanding of mutuality in marriage includes that a wife has as much claim on her husband's body as he does on hers, and choice regarding whether or not to marry once widowed.⁵⁸

Lynn Cohick claims that in the Epistles:

'Paul critiques his culture's patriarchal worldview because it does not support or reflect the gospel message of new life in Christ, of forgiveness of sins and fullness of life through the Holy Spirit. I would sum up Paul's gospel message like this: Because of his great love, God, in Christ, renews and restores all creation, including humanity. God shows no favouritism, and Paul's understanding of being "in Christ," relativizes all human cultures. God makes every believer a new person in Christ, and together they make a new community we call the church or the Body of Christ. Believers should think and act today in line with the values of God's promises and truth. These theological truths challenge the social hierarchy that assigned people positions of worth and value.'⁵⁹

The God that we worship and acknowledge as the creator of all remains engaged deeply and relationally in the continuing creation of the world; God's promised future is the reconciliation and transformation of all creation. While the transformed and redeemed world is not yet fully realised, as far as is possible we live the values of this promised future.

Subordination and headship

The two texts which have been often used to suggest that men have authority over their wives must be interpreted against this background of respectful relationships of mutual service. In order to address the misuse of Ephesians 5:22-24 to affirm power of men over women in marriage, one need do no more than read these verses within the context of the entire section on marriage.

'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. **Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.** For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of

57 Under Roman law, the legal status as free or freed determined the type of marriage that could be entered into, with social status determining whether a man could have a wife or a concubine. Slaves in the same household could enter into a relationship but its continuance was entirely in the hands of the owner. Lynn Cohick, 'What's love got to do with it?', in *ANZATS* (North Adelaide SA, 2017).

58 1 Corinthians 7:4; 1 Corinthians 7:40.

59 Lynn Cohick, 'Inside the mind of a misogynist?', lecture given for *Annual Lecture*, Tabor, Adelaide SA 2017, 1, 2.

water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind— yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.’ (Ephesians 5:21-33 NRSV)

In Ephesians, Paul writes about his understanding of ‘God’s gracious saving actions in Christ in history as the one Lord who brings peace to and unifies all humanity for good works of service to the praise of God.’⁶⁰ Following lyrical proclamation of the grace of God and the certainty of our salvation, in Ephesians 4:1-6:9 Paul explores the implications for everyday living in the light of that certainty. He begins with relationships within the church, the gifts that build up the community, and the contrast of the life of those alienated from God with those who live in the Spirit. He then turns to relationships within marriage, family and slavery.

The initial verse ‘Be subject to (*hypotasso*) one another out of reverence for Christ’ states the principle that guides the section on marriage:

The principle of mutual subjection is evident throughout the Pauline literature, as the Christian is called to servanthood and concern for the other (Gal 5:13; 1 Cor 8:1-13; 11:17-33; 12:1-14:33a; Rom 14:1-23). The submission or subjection is a mutual yielding in love, as the believer voluntarily gives up his or her own wishes for the sake of others. Compare Luther’s words in *The Freedom of a Christian*: ‘a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.’⁶¹

Verse 23 reads: ‘For the husband (*anēr*) is the head (*kephalē*) of the wife (*gynē*) just as Christ is the head (*kephalē*) of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour’ (NRSV).

Like the English word, ‘head,’ the Greek word *kephalē* has both literal (part of the human body) and metaphorical meanings. It is common for *kephalē* to be understood as ‘authority over.’ The most commonly cited study is that of Wayne Grudem, who analysed 2,336 examples of the use of the word in literature of the New Testament period to demonstrate that ‘authority over’ can be a legitimate understanding of *kephalē*.⁶² While

60 Frederick J. Long, ‘Ephesians: Paul’s political theology in Greco-Roman political context,’ in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew M. Pitts (Boston: Brill, 2012), 259.

61 Walter F Taylor and John Henry Paul Reumann, *Ephesians Colossians*, Augsburg commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 77,78; Luther, *Luther’s works*, vol. 3, 344.

62 2.1% of total instances of *kephalē* and 16.2% of the metaphorical instances.

others have proposed alternative understandings such as 'source'⁶³ or 'preeminent'⁶⁴ the evidence seems more tenuous. However, even when commentators understand Paul to be sharing the patriarchal view of marriage current in his society, they generally note the modifying phrases regarding love and self-sacrifice.

A closer look at Paul's argument shows that it is configured to make it obvious that the life in the Spirit does not conform to the social constructions of the dominant culture. Examining head-body rhetoric in antiquity reveals that the head is considered the most important part of the body and protection of the head was vital for the well-being of the whole. Therefore to protect the head (e.g. the general of an army, the emperor of the nation), members of the body were willing to sacrifice themselves and it was also the duty of the head to ensure its own safety. To sacrifice themselves was a demonstration of the love of the members of the body for the head, and from the position of power-over, the head's role was mercy, not love. When this view of the rights and responsibilities of the two halves of the head-body metaphor is compared to Ephesians 5:25-33 it is evident that Paul is providing a very different model of headship than one in which the head has authority over the other. Rather than the wife being instructed to give up her life for her husband (the head), the husband is called to give up his life for the wife (his body), in the same way that Christ gave up his life for the church (his body). He (the head) is charged to love his wife (the body). For those who lived within the traditional status conventions of the Greco-Roman society, this reversal would have been both very evident and very shocking. It fits the first-last, wise-foolish, humble-exalted reversals found in the Gospels and other Pauline epistles.

Lee-Barnewell's clear explication of this argument, using examples from the key writings of antiquity, concludes:

Ephesians 5:21–33 has played a key role in Christian history because of its possible patriarchal implications. However, the greater question may not be whether or not the passage sees a patriarchal headship, but how headship is redeemed in the eschatological age of a crucified Christ. As the head of the church, Christ is the one who nourishes and provides and is the primary cause of growth and unity. He does this because his role as head is centred on the defining event of the crucifixion, and through this he brings life to the church and unity

63 The initial logic for this translation is clearer in 1 Corinthians 3-8, as in verse 8 Paul writes 'Indeed man was not made from woman, but woman from man.'

64 Catherine Clark Kroeger draws her proposal for 'source' from a passage from Cyril of Alexandria where the two words are closely associated, and Stephen Bedale provides socio-cultural support for this interpretation. Gregory Dawes argues that it may be possible for this to be the metaphorical meaning, but that it is unlikely. Richard Cervin argues for 'preeminent,' omitting the connotation of authority. Michelle Lee-Barnewell, 'Turning kephalē on its head: The rhetoric of reversal in Ephesians 5:21-33,' in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew M. Pitts (Boston: Brill, 2012), 601.

with his body. Likewise, Paul calls the husband to be the head of the wife, and so through love and sacrifice to bring the two into their intended union.⁶⁵

This interpretation is in line with Pauline teaching on Jesus' model which is paradigmatic for all believers (Phil 2:1-8). Mutual submission and servanthood are the ideals for God's heirs. Paul rejects the Greco-Roman values on which cultural status and authority were based (e.g. 1 Cor 1:18-31; Phil 3:1-11.) This reading is further reinforced if the Ephesians 5 passage is read to the completion of the household references in 6:9 (the closing verse on slavery): '... for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.'

Verse 31, in which Paul shifts the body-as-metaphor to writing of the physical body (flesh, *sarx*), brings a mystical and eschatological dimension to Paul's teaching on marriage: there is reciprocity in the relationship when two become one. The wife's flesh is as his own, and his as her own. As Lynne Cohick writes:

This Christian distinctive, grounded in the charges to the first couple (Gen 2:24), connects to the eschatological vision of Christ and the church as inextricably united. The mystery of God's will (1:9), that Gentiles are coheirs with Jews in Christ, one body (3:3-9), has a further dimension. The marriage of two becoming one develops into a sign of the unity of Christ and the church, effective now and to be fully consummated in the end.⁶⁶

1 Corinthians 11:3

In the past this passage was used by the LCA and before that, the UELCA and ELCA, to regulate the involvement of women in the church.⁶⁷ Even leaving aside the requirement to interpret the passage in the light of the Christ event, the larger literary unit that this belongs to is a troubling one: the Greek text is unclear, particularly in verses 6 and 10, the logic is strange to us, and Paul appears to be responding to specific concerns raised with him, without referencing what he has heard, witnessed or read. If read hierarchically, the 'head of ...' sequence raises theological difficulties regarding the Trinity: 'it would contradict the confession of the Nicene Creed that the Son is equal with the Father in deity, power, honour, authority, and glory.'⁶⁸ The change of the words of Genesis 1:26-27

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Lynn Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2013), 141-2.

⁶⁷ Until the 1960s, for example, women were required to wear hats in Lutheran churches in Australia. DSTO 1F 'Statement on rights of women to vote at meetings of the congregations' and 'Role of women in the church' use 1 Corinthians 11:3 as one of three biblical texts which give the basis that 'a subordinate position has been given to women.' Rather than changes in practice leading to revoking of this historical document, some activities of women in the church (e.g. voting in the congregation and at Synod) have been expressly listed as not being activities that challenge male authority and there is an addendum to DSTO 1F that a male-only vote can be taken if considered necessary.

⁶⁸ V. C. Pfitzner, *First Corinthians*, Chi Rho commentary series (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1982), 167.

from 'image and likeness' to 'image and reflection/glory' (*doxa*) and then moving further from the Genesis account of image and likeness being integral to all humanity (male *and* female) to being invested only in the male is a troubling shift. Additionally, verses 2 – 9 appear to contradict verses 11 and 12 and chapter 7, where the reciprocity in marriage for which bodily union is the sign (as in Eph 5:31) is made explicit. 'For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does' (1 Cor 7:4).

Older commentaries typically address these difficulties by suggesting that the Corinthian women had been taking Christian freedom to excess and needed to be curbed. More recent interpretations suggest that Paul is talking only of dress, not of praying and prophesying (an earlier focus in commentaries), since he clearly is supportive of women undertaking these activities.

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. **But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.** Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:2-16 NRSV)

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians Vic Pfitzner asserted that due to the lack of clarity of this passage, it should not be 'pressed into service in modern debates on such matters as whether women should wear hats in church, or whether they should have voting rights ...'⁶⁹ Kevin Giles comments, 'None of Paul's appeals to creation stories in 1 Corinthians 11 can be read as weighty theological reflection or as giving permanently binding instruction.'⁷⁰ Consideration is included here because this passage has traditionally been used to support claims regarding the inferiority of women and headship has been used

69 *Ibid.*, 164.

70 Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 178.

by individuals as justification for the violence they have perpetuated against their female partner. For the sake of brevity, the treatment here of the many difficulties of the passage will be somewhat superficial, presupposing the detailed work cited.

On the basis of her study of Greek and Latin texts and traditions of antiquity, Sarah Ruden comments that the veil was 'the flag of female virtue, status, and security.'⁷¹ Slaves, including sexual slaves, were not typically veiled. Paul's exhortation for all women to veil when praying or prophesying in the church⁷² can therefore be seen, not as a sign of subordination, but as a step 'towards an outrageous equality,'⁷³ offering respectability to those on the lower echelons of society and honouring those for whom society had little regard.

Westfall also concludes that veiling gives agency to women. If veiling reflects modesty and honour, wearing a veil gives authority that permits public participation in prayer and prophecy without cultural offence. 'Westfall continues that 11:16 supports her contention for ... if Paul was worried about rebellious women, then this verse would not say 'anyone' but would be explicit in identifying women.'⁷⁴

Lucy Peppiatt attempts to untangle the logical difficulties and inconsistencies of the passage by contending that it is the interplay of quotations from the unknown source(s) referred to and quoted elsewhere in 1 Corinthians⁷⁵ with Paul's own words; this is a common rhetorical device of the era.⁷⁶ The basis on which she determines the two opposing views are the other writings of Paul, including the views on marriage in chapter 7 and Paul's insistence that social divisions in communion must be brought to unity in Christ.⁷⁷ She suggests that by considering the rhetorical structure, it is possible to see that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not simply addressing local conventions, but is a theological argument for unity in Christ.

The chief theological difficulty of the passage only exists if headship denotes superiority. From the earliest days, commentators have pushed against such an interpretation. Chrysostom explained that head refers to *substance*, condemning those that gave a hierarchal interpretation as implying that the Son was as far from the Father as man is from Christ.⁷⁸

71 Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Random House, 2011), 85.

72 1 Corinthians 11:5

73 Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time*, 87. It is further noted that the Latin for 'to veil' is the same as for a woman 'to marry,' that is, *nubere alicui*.

74 Cohick, 'Inside the mind of a misogynist?,' 7.

75 7:1 and following chapters; 6:12; 10:23.

76 Lucy Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 66-111.

77 The words Peppiatt attributes to Paul's opponents are verses 4-5; 7-10; 14.

78 John Chrysostom, 'Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the epistles of Paul to the Corinthians,' in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 3.

Peppiatt reminds us that Paul's analogy is limited, for man did not create woman in the way that Christ created man, and the Father did not create the Son, for the Son is eternally begotten. There was never a time when the Son was not; while there was a time when humanity was not. And she rightly points back to 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, where Paul chastises the Corinthians for following human leaders and boasting based on worldly criteria. Paul declares 'all things are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.' All believers, men and women, are in Christ; and through Christ's cross, God reconciles the world to himself. Paul wrestles Christ from the Corinthians grasp, as they try to shove Christ into their social hierarchy, and rightly places Christ as the Son who with the Father and the Spirit, draw all humanity into relationship with the Godhead.⁷⁹

Peppiatt argues that the comparison of the changed wording from Genesis 1:26-27 does not fit the care with which Paul quotes in Galatians,⁸⁰ and that glory / *doxa* is nowhere used in the creation account and is elsewhere used by Paul to speak of God's glory, the glory that will be for all believers, and the greater glory which each believer is being transformed to as the Spirit works in them.⁸¹ This leads her to the conclusion that Paul is alluding to aberrant Corinthian theology in 11:7-9 and offers his own corrective in 11:10-16. 'Not only does it rescue Paul either from gross misogyny or just strange and contradictory thinking, but it also gives us the key to understanding how 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 is entirely consistent with Paul's theology, with his views on the mutuality of relations between men and women expressed elsewhere ...'⁸²

Each of these arguments provide a credible account of how 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not in conflict with other Pauline writings by promoting a hierarchy of gender, but further evidence of rejection of the social hierarchy of the surrounding society and promotion of full participation of women within the church. Women are invited to use their freedom in the Lord and make choices that affirm their dignity in Christ.

Conclusion

When a Lutheran hermeneutic is applied to the question of subordination and headship, it is found that Scripture does not support a hierarchal view of marriage. Despite the patriarchal assumptions of the Hebrew Scriptures, many passages can be seen to highlight the humanity of women, and the overarching theme of freedom from oppression gives a framework through which to view the many oppressive stories. Jesus' regard for women and the absence of gender as a point of division for the work of the Holy Spirit resonate with the Gospel message: God's grace is a gift to all, God shows no partiality but we are one in Christ, reconciled to God.

When the specific texts that mention subordination and headship are looked at carefully to find how they fit with these larger themes of Scripture, the traditional patriarchal

79 Cohick, 'Inside the mind of a misogynist?', 10,11.

80 Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth*, 51.

81 1 or 2:7; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

82 Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth*, 135.

views can be seen as eisegesis. Rather than Ephesians 5:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 providing a view of marriage as a hierarchy in which women are to be subservient to men, they give no support to a view of women having a lesser authority than men within marriage. "In the end, both married partners take their identity as members of Christ's body, to whom they are united through his love. This is the power of the gospel, which unsettles the status quo and lifts up the humble."⁸³

Any use of these passages to justify a husband's use of power over his wife, in whatever form, is an abuse of Scripture and an abuse of power.

⁸³ Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary*, 140; *ibid.*

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