

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF EVANGELICAL FEMINISM

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*An evangelical feminist is one who has a high view of Scripture and believes the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women without role distinctions between the two. Their principles for interpreting Scripture differ markedly from those of the advocates of role differences for men and women. A comparison of evangelical feminists' principles with the grammatico-historical method of interpretation clarifies what and how great they deviate from traditional views of a woman's role in church and at home. The disputed principles include the issues of ad hoc documents, interpretive centers, the analogy of faith, slavery as a model for the role of women, culturally biased interpretation, cultural relativity, and patriarchal and sexist texts. An examination of these issues shows evangelical feminist hermeneutics to fall short of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation.*

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### DEFINITIONS AND DIFFERENCES

The significant changes for women in society that began about thirty years ago have not bypassed the church. The changes have meant a challenge to the Christian community to consider afresh the role of women in their relationship to men in the church and in the home. The instigators of this challenge call themselves "feminists."

"Feminist" is a broad term that includes several groups. "Secular feminists" are those who do not accept the Bible as authoritative.<sup>2</sup> "Religious feminists" are "individuals who do not identify with Christianity, but whose beliefs nevertheless include a religious worldview."<sup>3</sup> "Christian feminists" work from the standpoint of a commitment to the Christian faith but accept the authority of

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas J. Fricke, "What is the Feminist Hermeneutic? An Analysis of Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91 (Winter 1994):45.

<sup>3</sup>R. Letham, "The Hermeneutics of Feminism," *Themelios* 17 (April/May 1992):4.

Scripture in only a limited way.<sup>4</sup> A final classification of feminists includes those identified as "evangelical feminists." An evangelical feminist has a high view of Scripture and is "one who believes that the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women without role distinctions based on gender."<sup>5</sup> The focus of this essay is on this last group.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 4. Fricke refers to this category as "liberal feminists" ("Feminist Hermeneutic" 45).

<sup>5</sup>Daniel G. Lundy, "A Hermeneutical Framework for the Role of Women," *The Baptist Review of Theology* 2 (Fall 1992):57. Other labels that coincide with "evangelical feminists" are biblical feminists, conservative Christian feminists, and evangelical egalitarians.

A group that best represents the position of evangelical feminism is Christians for Biblical Equality, organized in the latter part of 1987. A position paper "Men, Women, and Biblical Equality" published in 1989 stated the beliefs of this organization. The paper contained twelve "Biblical Truths" and five points of "Application."<sup>6</sup> Groothuis expresses the goal of this organization and of evangelical feminism well:

The goal of evangelical feminism is that men and women be allowed to serve God as individuals, according to their own unique gifts rather than according to a culturally predetermined personality slot called "Christian manhood" or "Christian womanhood."<sup>7</sup>

The individuals primarily responsible for laying the foundation of evangelical feminism are Nancy Hardesty, Letha Scanzoni, Paul Jewett, Virginia Mollenkott, and Dorothy Pape. Prominent names currently associated with the movement are Gilbert Bilezikian, Mary Evans, W. Ward Gasque, Kevin Giles, Patricia Gundry, E. Margaret Howe, Gretchen Gaebelien Hull, Craig Keener, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Richard Kroeger, Walter Liefeld, Alvera Mickelsen, David Scholer, Aida Besan\_on Spencer, and Ruth Tucker.

The purpose of this paper is to examine certain hermeneutical principles being implemented among those who are evangelical feminists.<sup>8</sup> As much as possible, the evaluation of these principles will

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<sup>6</sup>See "Men, Women, & Biblical Equality," *Journal for Biblical Equality* 3 (1991):1-3; also cited in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991):469-72, but without approval in this latter work.

<sup>7</sup>Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 110.

<sup>8</sup>Groothuis recently identified the following eight strategies as part of the biblical feminist hermeneutic: (1) Biblical interpretation is to endeavor to be faithful to the biblical author's intent in writing the specific passage in question. (2) It is important to know the accurate translation of the passages traditionally used to silence and subjugate women. (3) It is crucial to maintain interpretive consistency with the rest of a biblical author's writings as well as the whole of Scripture. (4) Texts couched in a context of culturally specific instructions are not to be taken a priori as normative for the present day. (5) Culturally specific instructions are to be interpreted not only in light of biblical doctrine and principle, but also in light of the culture to which they were written and the author's reason for writing them. (6) Events recorded in the Bible should be understood in light of the culture of that time. (7) In light of the progressive nature of God's revelation in the Bible, NT texts concerning women should be considered

use the standard of the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. The scope of this study necessitates focusing only on principles that differ from the hermeneutics of those called "hierarchicalists,"<sup>9</sup> the ones frequently used in the Pauline "hard passages."<sup>10</sup>

There are two primary reasons why the role of women and their relationship to men in the church and the family is one of the "great divides" among Christians today. The first reason is a difference of opinion with regards to the exegesis of the relevant Biblical texts.

The second reason is the role of hermeneutics in the debate. Johnston believes that this is what is behind the first reason. He

more accurate indicators of God's intent for women than those provided in the OT. (8) The need to guard against interpreting the Bible in conformity with one's own cultural pre-understanding or personal expectations (*Caught in the Conflict* 112-15).

<sup>9</sup>The hierarchicalist position also has the labels "traditionalist" and "complementarian." Swartley sees the distinguishing marks of this view as: (1) Women are expected to be subordinate to men—in the home, church, and society. (2) Especially in the home, husbands are to exercise headship over wives, with roles prescribed in accord with this pattern. (3) Within the church, women are restricted from the preaching ministry and from teaching men. Other forms of leadership are to be exercised under the authority and leadership of men (Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* [Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1983] 151).

Eight points summarize the "Danvers Statement" with its more detailed description of the traditionalist position: (1) both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood; (2) distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart; (3) Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin; (4) the Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women; (5) the OT, as well as the NT, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women, with both testaments also affirming the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community; (6) redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse; (7) in all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission—domestic, religious, or civil—ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin; (8) in both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside biblical criteria for particular ministries, but rather biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

<sup>10</sup>Pauline "hard passages" are those which speak against the equality of roles between men and women in the church and home: 1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Tim 2:8-15; Eph 5:21-33; 1 Pet 3:1-7 (Robert K. Johnston, "The Role of Women in the Church and Family: The Issue of Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Evangelicals at an Impasse*, ed. by Robert K. Johnston [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979] 52).

comments,

For behind the apparent differences in approach and opinion regarding the women's issue are opposing principles for interpreting Scripture—i.e., different hermeneutics. Here is the real issue facing evangelical theology as it seeks to answer the women's question.<sup>11</sup>

It is the purpose of this essay to examine and evaluate seven relevant principles of hermeneutics of evangelical feminists and thereby provide a heightened mutual understanding of the basic difference between the two sides. This will hopefully lessen the "great divide" that exists in Christendom concerning a woman's role in the church and the home.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 50.

THE PRINCIPLE OF *AD HOC* DOCUMENTS

A prominent characteristic of evangelical feminism is its insistence that understanding the literary form of a passage plays a major role in adequate interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the phrase describing this axiom is the "hermeneutics of *ad hoc* documents."<sup>13</sup> The principle is prominent in the interpretive scheme of 1 Tim 2:8-15 by evangelical feminists.

The literary form of 1 Timothy closely relates to the purpose of the epistle. According to Scholer, Paul writes the letter to help Timothy handle the problem of false teachers in Ephesus: "The purpose of 1 Timothy is to combat the Ephesian heresy that Timothy faced."<sup>14</sup>

To some, a necessary corollary to this view of 1 Timothy's purpose is to perceive the epistle as an *ad hoc* letter.<sup>15</sup> The implication of this *ad hoc* perspective is to restrict the teaching of 2:9-15 to the original audience. Concerning the instructions in 2:9-10 and 15, Fee writes,

All of these instructions, including 2:11-12, were *ad hoc* responses to the waywardness of the young widows in Ephesus who had already gone astray after Satan and were disrupting the church.

It simply cannot be demonstrated that Paul intended 1 Tim 3:11-12 [*sic*, 1 Tim 2:11-12] as a rule in all churches at all times. In fact the occasion and purpose of 1 Timothy as a whole, and these verses in particular, suggest

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>13</sup>Gordon D. Fee, "Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, With Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *Ad Hoc* Documents," *JETS* 28 (June 1985):141-51.

<sup>14</sup>David M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. by Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986) 199. Others taking this position are Bruce Barron, "Putting Women in Their Place: 1 Timothy 2 and Evangelical Views of Women in Church Leadership," *JETS* 33 (December 1990):453; Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984) xx; Alan Padgett, "Wealthy Women at Ephesus," *Int* 441 (January 1987):20.

<sup>15</sup>Fee is reputedly the commentator who originated and popularized this view. He writes, "It must be noted again that 1 Timothy is not intended to establish church order but to respond in a very *ad hoc* way to the Ephesian situation with its straying elders" (Fee, "Reflections on Church Order" 146). Also prominent in the discussion about the *ad hoc* nature of 1 Timothy is Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15" 200.

otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

It is impossible to deny the *ad hoc* nature of 1 Timothy. The inroads of false teachers into the church under Timothy's leadership are the evident occasion for the epistle. What is questionable, however, is the *ad hoc* interpretation that limits the teaching of 2:11-15 based on an *ad hoc* literary style. Paul's epistle to the churches of Galatia is *ad hoc* in nature. Yet no one limits the teaching of Gal 2:16 to the original recipients.<sup>17</sup> Also, Moo's observation is valid: "The isolation of local circumstances as the occasion for a particular teaching does not, by itself, indicate anything about the normative nature of that teaching."<sup>18</sup>

A further problem with the *ad hoc* interpretive principle is that it rests upon the assumption of 1 Timothy's sole purpose being to combat false doctrine. This purpose does find support in Paul's words in 1:4: "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines." Yet it ignores the other purpose statement in 1 Tim 3:14-15:

I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

These two verses support the view that Paul writes to his spiritual son to instruct him on how to order and direct the life of a Christian congregation. Hurley expresses this perspective:

It is universally accepted that 1 Timothy was intended to provide a clear statement concerning certain issues which its author, whom I take to be Paul, felt needed attention. The letter forms a 'spiritual will' from Paul to Timothy. In the letter Paul indicates that he hopes to be able to come soon to Timothy, but fears that he will be delayed (3:14-15a). He writes,

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<sup>16</sup>Gordon D. Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part III: The Great Watershed—Intentionality & Particularity/Eternality: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case," *Crux* 26 (December 1990):35.

<sup>17</sup>Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987) 146-47.

<sup>18</sup>Douglas J. Moo, "The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15: A Rejoinder," *Trinity Journal* 2 (Fall 1981):219.

I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God. . . .<sup>19</sup>

A "church manual" approach to 1 Timothy views the teaching of the epistle as normative.<sup>20</sup> Even if one agrees with this analysis of 1 Timothy, it does not follow that everything within the epistle is normative. Most agree that Paul's emphasis in 2:8 "I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension" is upon the manner of life of the one praying, not upon his posture.<sup>21</sup>

But neither of the above proposed purposes of 1 Timothy is preferable. It is best to understand 3:15 as the overarching purpose that embraces the purpose stated in 1:3.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF AN INTERPRETIVE CENTER

One of the hermeneutical questions related to the ecclesiastical and domestic roles of women is whether or not there is a single text that determines the interpretation of all the other passages. Stated another way, is there a clear text,<sup>23</sup> an interpretive center,<sup>24</sup> a theologi-

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<sup>19</sup>James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 196. Also agreeing with this viewpoint are Bacchiocchi, *Women* 115; Douglas Moo, "What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991) 180.

<sup>20</sup>Hurley holds this position and summarizes it by saying, "Despite the obviously general intention of the author, a large number of recent writers on the subject of the role of women have suggested that the matters discussed and the instructions given in this letter ought to be seen as relevant only in its particular time period. Even a superficial reading of the letter shows, however, that its author would not accept such a view of it" (*Man and Woman* 196-97).

<sup>21</sup>E.g., *ibid.*, 198.

<sup>22</sup>This is an improvement over the view of Gritz who sees a twofold purpose for writing given in 1:3 and 3:15 (Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991] 107-8).

<sup>23</sup>Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15" 213.

<sup>24</sup>C. Powell, "A Stalemate of Genders? Some Hermeneutical Reflections," *Themelios* 17 (April/May 1992):18.

cal and hermeneutical key,<sup>25</sup> a "*locus classicus*,"<sup>26</sup> a defining passage, a starting point that serves as a filter in analyzing the NT view regarding these female roles?<sup>27</sup>

Most evangelical feminists affirm the existence of such a starting point when seeking God's will on the role of women. Yet they do not agree on what that starting point is. They do agree that the interpreter should not start with the Pauline "hard passages." The comment of Gasque is informative:

The Egalitarian View also takes these texts [I Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33-35; I Tim. 2:11-15; Eph. 5:22-33; I Pet. 3:1-7] seriously, but it does not begin with these. It points out that if you leave these texts to the side until the end of the discussion, you will come out with a different conclusion. If you look at these texts first, you have basically programmed yourself to come to the Traditional View; but if you put these texts aside for the time being and first study all else that the Bible has to teach theologically about the role of men and women—in society and in the created order, in the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God, in the church and the home—then you come to a different position.<sup>28</sup>

One recommended starting place has been Gal 3:28 where Paul declares to the Galatians that there is "neither male nor female." Some see this as the interpretive filter which determines the meaning of the other passages. Bruce represents this view when he writes,

Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Cor. 14:34f. or 1 Tim. 2:11f., they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not vice versa.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Grant R. Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," *JETS* 20 (December 1977):348.

<sup>26</sup>Letha D. Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, TX: Word, 1974) 18-19.

<sup>27</sup>Scott E. McClelland, "The New Reality in Christ: Perspectives From Biblical Studies," in *Gender Matters*, ed. by June Steffensen Hagen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 67.

<sup>28</sup>W. Ward Gasque, "The Role of Women in the Church, in Society, and in the Home," *Crux* 19 (September 1983):4.

<sup>29</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 190. See also Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 74-75; McClelland, "New Reality" 65-67; Gasque, "Role of Women" 4.

Scanzoni and Hardesty concur with Bruce in stating,

The biblical theologian does not build on isolated proof texts but first seeks the *locus classicus*, the major biblical statement, on a given matter. (The doctrine of creation and fall, for example, is to be found most clearly spelled out in Gen. 1-3 and Rom. 5:12-21, not in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 or 1 Tim. 2:13-14.) Passages which deal with an issue systematically are used to help understand incidental references elsewhere. Passages which are theological and doctrinal in content are used to interpret those where the writer is dealing with practical local cultural problems. (Except for Gal. 3:28, all of the references to women in the New Testament are contained in passages dealing with practical concerns about personal relationships or behavior in worship services.)<sup>30</sup>

Another recommended interpretive center is Creation-Redemption. Weber comments, "Egalitarians, then, organize their understanding of the sweep of redemption history in terms of creation and redemption and believe that the women's issue should be seen in that context."<sup>31</sup>

To illustrate the lack of agreement among feminist writers further, a third suggested theological key identifies the highest norms or standards taught in the Bible as the starting point, and begins there. The source of these norms is usually the lofty standards emphasized by Jesus, as well as the statements about the purpose of Christ's ministry and the purpose of the gospel.<sup>32</sup>

Evangelical feminists have not listened to one of their own, David Scholer, on this subject. Scholer's says it is wrong to identify a controlling text regarding women's role and status in the church. His words are, "What I want to stress is that from a hermeneutical point of view the question of where one enters the discussion is really an open question to which no canonical text speaks with clarity."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All* 18-19. It is interesting that the authors remove this statement from their revised edition of this work (Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be*, rev. ed. [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986] 25).

<sup>31</sup>Timothy P. Weber, "Evangelical Egalitarianism: Where We Are Now," *Journal for Biblical Equality* 1 (1987):80.

<sup>32</sup>Alvera Mickelsen, "There is Neither Male nor Female in Christ," in *Women in Ministry*, ed. by Bonnidell and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1989) 177-79.

<sup>33</sup>David M. Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 30 (December 1987):417-18. Scholer appears to ignore his own advice, however, when he writes in his conclusion, "Such limited texts need not be ignored, excluded or polemicalised

In essence, Scholer says that instead of attempting to identify an interpretive center, each text should have equal weight in developing a biblical theology of the role of women. Biblical theology should build upon all relevant texts. For several reasons, Scholer's proposal is the preferred solution to this hermeneutical issue. First, as already stated by Scholer, the NT does not specify a starting point for this or many other doctrines.<sup>34</sup> To choose a theological and hermeneutical key often reflects one's personal presuppositions.

Next, as Blomberg points out, the avoidance of an interpretive center is consistent with an evangelical doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture. He comments,

I think that if we as evangelicals take seriously our doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture, then it is hermeneutically impossible to set up one text as the interpretive grid through which everything else must be filtered.<sup>35</sup>

A third reason why this view is favored is that it allows for the hermeneutical principle universally agreed upon among those with a high view of biblical inspiration: it is necessary for all relevant texts to harmonize with each other.<sup>36</sup> This allows for input from each text that touches on the subject, without excluding the unique contribution of each to the doctrine.

Finally, to use Gal 3:28 or any other starting-point as the interpretive grid through which other passages are understood, automatically colors the meaning emerging from other passages. As Thomas argues, "It is impossible to deal with literature accurately if one's mind is already preconditioned to discover something that the literature does not relate to."<sup>37</sup>

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against. Rather, they should be interpreted from a particular vantage point—the dual commitments to the equal dignity and equality of men and women and to Scriptural authority" (419).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 418.

<sup>35</sup>Craig Blomberg, "Response to Catherine Kroeger on I Timothy 2," *Journal of Biblical Equality* 1 (December 1989):44. Blomberg expresses agreement with Kroeger's proposal of evaluating and comparing all Scriptures to arrive at a proper position regarding women's role in the church (Catherine C. Kroeger, "Women in the Church: A Classicist's View of 1 Tim 2:11-15," *Journal of Biblical Equality* 1 [December 1989]:3).

<sup>36</sup>Powell, "Stalemate" 18.

<sup>37</sup>Robert L. Thomas, "Some Hermeneutical Ramifications of Contextualization and

## THE PRINCIPLE OF THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

Closely related to the issue of a controlling text is the principle of "the analogy of faith." The principle of the analogy of faith says that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture.<sup>38</sup> In light of this internal agreement, no verse or passage can have a meaning isolated from the rest of Scripture.<sup>39</sup> Yet the role of the analogy of faith in the context of "clear" and "obscure" passages is debatable. The issue is how to handle "unclear" texts in light of the agreed upon truth that Scripture does not contradict Scripture. A resolving of this issue is key in the interpretation of women's place in the church and home.<sup>40</sup>

Feminists of the evangelical persuasion advocate that the analogy of faith principle means the clearer passages should determine the interpretation of the less clear ones.<sup>41</sup> They hold the "clear" text on women's roles to be Gal 3:28<sup>42</sup> or one of other starting-points referred to in the previous section, and perceive 1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:34-35, and 1 Tim 2:11-12 to be the obscure passages.

Another way of applying the analogy of faith principle is to refrain from preferring one passage over another. The basic approach of this variation is to give equal attention to "obscure" or "disputed" texts.<sup>43</sup> This technique does not disregard the analogy of faith

Feminist Literature" (paper read at Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, November 1986) 18.

<sup>38</sup>"The analogy of faith" is defined by Ramm as "the system of faith or doctrine found in Holy Scripture." He goes on to say, "The basic assumption here is that there is one system of truth or theology contained in Scripture, and therefore all doctrines must cohere or agree with each other. That means that the interpretation of specific passages must not contradict the total teaching of Scripture on a point. This is similar to saying that Scripture interprets Scripture" (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970] 107).

<sup>39</sup>Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) 27.

<sup>40</sup>Johnston, "Role of Women" 73.

<sup>41</sup>Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics" 417; Powell, "Stalemate" 17; Gasque, "Role of Women" 6; Johnston, "Role of Women" 73.

<sup>42</sup>Pierce states, "The clearer, more general proclamation of Gal 3:28 rightly serves as a foundation principle against which the more obscure text of 1 Tim 2:8-15 can be interpreted" (Ronald W. Pierce, "Evangelicals and Gender Roles in the 1990s: 1 Tim 2:8-15, a Test Case," *JETS* 36 [September 1993]:353-54).

<sup>43</sup>John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and

principle, but instead employs it after completion of the exegetical procedure, as more or less of a "double check" on the results of one's exegetical investigation.<sup>44</sup>

Two strong considerations make this second approach to the analogy-of-faith principle preferable. First, it keeps the influence of the interpreter's personal biases to a minimum. Piper and Grudem "hit the nail on the head" when they wrote, "We are all biased and would very likely use this principle of interpretation to justify neglecting the texts that do not suit our bias while insisting that the ones that suit our bias are crystal clear."<sup>45</sup>

Second, interpreting a passage in this way forces the interpreter to consider seriously all relevant passages. This prevents exegetical laziness by requiring an exegetical accounting for all passages germane to the issue. The following recommendation is fitting: "Our procedure should be rather to continue to read Scripture carefully and prayerfully, seeking a position that dismisses no texts but interprets all the relevant texts of Scripture in a coherent way."<sup>46</sup>

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF SLAVERY AS A MODEL FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN

A predominant concept in the literature of evangelical feminism is that the relationship between slaves and masters parallels that between wives and husbands, thus impacting the issue of women and church leadership.<sup>47</sup> Proponents have offered two other justifications of the same principle. First, "Scriptural interpretation must allow for continuing actualization as necessary implications are drawn out."<sup>48</sup> A second justification is that "one is informed by the

Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991) 90.

<sup>44</sup>Robert L. Thomas, "Introduction to Exegesis" (unpublished class notes, Greek Exegesis I, The Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, 1987) 17.

<sup>45</sup>Piper and Grudem, "Overview" 90.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>47</sup>For a sampling, see Clarence Boomsma, *Male and Female, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 43-52; Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1994):3-17; Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 184-224.

<sup>48</sup>Johnston, "Role of Women" 74. This is not a claim of progressive revelation, but of

history of biblical interpretation, which may shed light on a passage at hand.<sup>49</sup>

Keener states the rationale of the principle clearly:

Those who today will admit that slavery is wrong but still maintain that husbands must have authority over their wives are inconsistent. If they were consistent with their method of interpretation, which does not take enough account of cultural differences, it is likely that, had they lived one hundred fifty years ago, they would have had to have opposed the abolitionists as subverters of the moral order—as many Bible-quoting white slave owners and their allies did. Many of the traditions which today use Scripture to subordinate women once did the same for slavery before that idea was anathema in our culture. In contrast, the method of interpretation we favor in this book is closer to the methods favored by the abolitionists.<sup>50</sup>

The basis for treating the male/female relationship like the master/slave relationship is the scriptural similarity between the two. Boomsma points this out when he says,

There are several comparable elements that suggest such a parallel. As we have seen, in Galatians 3:28 the distinctions between slave and free and male and female, although they continue to exist, are superseded by equality in Christ in the church. The instructions in Paul's letters prominently modify the relations between slaves and masters, and between husbands and wives, as in Ephesians 5:22-33. Similarly Paul places restrictions on both slaves and women by instructing slaves to obey their masters and women to be subservient to their husbands and to refrain exercising equality in the authoritative offices of the congregation.

What is of great significance is the parallelism between the grounds on which the apostle supports his instructions to both slaves and women. In 1 Timothy 6:1 he urges slaves to respect their masters "so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered." In Titus 2:5 he requires women to be subject to their husbands "so that no one will malign the

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progressive understanding. This progressive understanding has manifested itself in the church's doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian abolitionist movement. It also is worthy of consideration in determining theological truth for women *in our day*.

<sup>49</sup>Gasque, "Role of Women" 9. The point is that the interpreter should be informed by the change in attitude among Christians toward slavery when considering the role of women.

<sup>50</sup>Keener, *Paul* 207-8.

word of God."<sup>51</sup>

Despite these impressive parallels, one major setback confronts this principle: "The existence of slavery is not rooted in any creation ordinance, but the existence of marriage is."<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Paul laid down principles in the book of Philemon that would ultimately destroy the institution of slavery. This is not true of the male/female relationship. Poythress is correct when he declares,

In the NT, there are too many passages that never "drop the second shoe." The passages say that women must submit to their husbands. But they never say explicitly that husbands must submit to their wives. They explicitly instruct Timothy and Titus about appointing men as elders, but they never explicitly mention the possibility of women elders.<sup>53</sup>

Kassian states a final stumbling-block for the slavery analogy in several ways when she writes,

Biblical feminists view the Bible as open to alteration. One of the basic presuppositions of Biblical feminist theology is that the Bible is not absolute and that its meaning can "evolve" and "transform." Since the Bible presents no *absolute* standard of right and wrong, feminists maintain that they must decide this for themselves. This basic premise allows them to interpret the Bible in *any manner* appropriate to their immediate circumstances.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Boomsma, *Male and Female* 48. In addition to these scriptural parallels, Giles cites a number of general similarities between the biblical arguments for slavery and the permanent subordination of women (Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery" 17).

<sup>52</sup>Piper and Grudem, "Overview" 65. Contra Giles, who states, "The biblical case for slavery is the counterpart of the case for the subordination of women, the only difference being that the case for slavery has far more weighty biblical support" ("Biblical Case for Slavery" 16).

<sup>53</sup>Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Two Hermeneutical Tensions in Evangelical Feminism" (paper presented at the Eastern Regional Evangelical Theological Society Conference, Philadelphia, April 5, 1991) 2.

<sup>54</sup>Mary A. Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990) 147. Kassian has overstated her case regarding some biblical feminists. She probably has in mind primarily liberal feminists, but her point is valid regarding some evangelical feminists as Fricke comments: "Evangelical feminists follow the notion of a kind of progressive revelation, an evolutionary development of doctrine in the Christian church" ("Feminist Hermeneutic" 55).

### THE PRINCIPLE OF CULTURALLY BIASED INTERPRETATION

A recurring question in a quest to understand the biblical teaching on the role of women is, "Can there be an objective understanding of Scripture?" Is it possible for a person to set aside biases and prejudices for the purpose of ascertaining the meaning of the text?

"No" is the response of several in the evangelical feminist camp. Scholer illustrates the negative answer: "Now, however, I feel that I have come to understand for myself, along with many others, that in fact objective interpretation and objective hermeneutic is a myth."<sup>55</sup> One of the "many others" is Johnston. His conviction is that the reason for the continuing spate of evangelical literature on women's role in the church and family is the role of the reader/interpreter in determining the meaning of the text:

It is the reader who uses incomplete knowledge as the basis of judgment. It is the reader who chooses between equally valid possibilities based on personal preference. It is the reader who develops criteria for what is universal and what is culturally specific, what is translatable and what is transcultural. It is the reader who brings to a text a specific understanding of Scripture's overarching unity. It is the reader who finds it difficult to remain vulnerable to the text as it confronts Christian and pagan alike.<sup>56</sup>

In light of this he concludes that evangelicals hide themselves behind "the veneer of objectivity."<sup>57</sup>

The position that objectivity in interpretation is a false notion does not demand the abandonment of all attempts to determine the meaning of a text. What it does dictate is: (1) the exegete must recognize the impact of his biases upon both his hermeneutic and interpretation<sup>58</sup> and (2) a proper hermeneutical procedure.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics" 412.

<sup>56</sup>Robert K. Johnston, "Biblical Authority and Interpretation: The Test Case of Women's Role in the Church and Home Updated," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. by Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986) 35.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>58</sup>Powell, "Stalemate" 17.

The view of the mythological nature of objective interpretation is contrary to the traditional grammatico-historical method of interpretation. It is a standard corollary of the long-honored approach that one can investigate a passage in an unbiased manner. Kaiser's definition of interpretation clearly evidences this:

To interpret we must in every case reproduce the sense the Scriptural writer intended for his own words. The first step in the interpretive process is to link only those ideas with the author's language that he connected with them. The second step is to express these ideas understandably.<sup>60</sup>

Dockery concurs:

The goal of biblical interpretation is to approach the text in terms of the objective ideal. This goal does not mean approaching the Bible without any presuppositions at all, for the Bible itself provides the interpreter with certain presuppositions. Yet, the interpreter is expected to strive as diligently as possible for objective understanding.<sup>61</sup>

Is it possible for the interpreter to exclude bias in the hermeneutical process, or is this simply a delusion of grandeur or a hiding behind the veneer of objectivity? However one may answer these questions, all agree that the interpreter has prejudices in approaching the Word of God. Yet the grammatico-historical method of interpretation advocates the possibility and necessity of excluding these prejudices. The Reformers were well aware of this and consequently geared their approach to exegesis along lines of the *tabula rasa* idea. Commenting on this, Sproul says,

The interpreter was expected to strive as hard as possible for an objective reading of the text through the grammatico-historical

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<sup>59</sup>It is beyond the scope of this paper to identify and evaluate what is the currently recommended hermeneutical procedure to remedy the problem of bias in interpretation. For detailed presentations, see Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), and Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991).

<sup>60</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy*, ed. by Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 118.

<sup>61</sup>David S. Dockery, "The Role of Women in Worship and Ministry: Some Hermeneutical Questions," *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1987):376.

approach. Though subjective influences always present a clear and present danger of distortion, the student of the Bible was expected to utilize every possible safeguard in the pursuit of the ideal, listening to the message of Scripture without mixing in his own prejudices.<sup>62</sup>

What response can a person offer to the claim that objective interpretation is a myth?<sup>63</sup> What procedures will exclude personal background and culture from hindering an understanding of the intent of the authors of Scripture? Piper and Grudem offer five suggestions to provide interpreters with confidence that they have excluded their biases and prejudices from the hermeneutical process. (1) Search your motives and seek to empty yourself of all that would tarnish a true perception of reality. (2) Pray that God would give you humility, teachability, wisdom, insight, fairness, and honesty. (3) Make every effort to submit your mind to the unbending and unchanging grammatical and historical reality of the biblical texts in Greek and Hebrew, using the best methods of study available to get as close as possible to the intentions of the biblical writers. (4) Test your conclusions by the history of exegesis to reveal any chronological snobbery or cultural myopia. (5) Test your conclusions in the real world of contemporary ministry and look for resonance from mature and godly people.<sup>64</sup>

To speak of objective interpretation is not to diminish the reality of the exegete's background and culture. As Thomas states,

It must be granted that twentieth century exegetes are outsiders to the cultures in which the Bible was written and for this reason can never achieve a complete understanding of the original meaning of the Bible in its historical setting. An undue emphasis upon this limitation, however, loses sight of the fact that all historical study is a weighing of probabilities. The more evidence we have, the higher degree of probability we can attain. The practice of exegesis, therefore, is a continued search for greater probability and a more refined understanding.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977) 105.

<sup>63</sup>As a proponent of the grammatico-historical hermeneutic, Thomas offers a ten-point response to those who insist on the impossibility of excluding the interpreter's biases in the hermeneutical process ("Hermeneutical Ramifications" 4-9).

<sup>64</sup>Piper and Grudem, "Overview" 84.

<sup>65</sup>Thomas, "Hermeneutical Ramifications" 10.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CULTURAL RELATIVITY  
IN BIBLICAL REVELATION

The major hermeneutical issue in interpreting the Pauline "hard passages" 1 Tim 2:11-15 in particular is whether the teaching is cultural or normative. Quarrels about the meaning of the 1 Timothy passage are one issue, but even those who agree on its meaning disagree on how to apply it. Fee, who argues that the passage does not apply to the issue of women in ministry today, agrees with the interpretation of those who see it as restricting what women can do when the church meets for public worship. He writes,

My point is a simple one. It is hard to deny that *this* text prohibits women teaching men in the Ephesian church; but it is the unique text in the NT, and as we have seen, its reason for being is *not* to correct the rest of the New Testament, but to correct a very *ad hoc* problem in Ephesus.<sup>66</sup>

The comment of Fee illustrates that the debate involving 1 Tim 2:11-15 consists not only of how to interpret this passage but also of how to apply it. The primary hindrance to discerning the application is the ascertaining of whether the text is culture-limited or transcultural. To state it another way, the concern is "discerning between the permanent, universal, normative teaching of Scripture on the one hand and, on the other hand, that which is transient, not applicable to every people in every culture, not intended to function as a mandate for normative behavior."<sup>67</sup> This is a major topic in contemporary studies of hermeneutics that is particularly relevant to determining women's roles in the home and the church.<sup>68</sup>

Evangelical feminist hermeneutics advocate widespread distinctions between universal principles and localized applications. In fact, Weber identifies this as one of the three distinguishing marks in the egalitarian reading of the Bible.<sup>69</sup> The problem is not with the principle but with how extensive its implementation should be. How

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<sup>66</sup>Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics" 36.

<sup>67</sup>J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. by Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 222.

<sup>68</sup>William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 409.

<sup>69</sup>Weber, "Evangelical Egalitarianism" 77.

to determine what is "cultural" or "normative" requires further discussion.

Resolving this matter requires answers to two important questions: (1) Does Scripture convey universal principles or culture-limited application? (2) What methodology should be followed to distinguish what is normative from what is cultural in Scripture?

Three suggestions of how to answer the former question are conceivable. The first recommendation is to view Scripture as conveying what is normative for all believers at all times unless Scripture itself explicitly expresses the limitation. McQuilkin represents this view when he writes, "My thesis is that a fully authoritative Bible means that every teaching in Scripture is universal unless Scripture itself treats it as limited."<sup>70</sup> Identifying criteria for non-normativeness is the focus of this approach to distinguishing what is normative from what is cultural.<sup>71</sup>

The second recommendation is to see Scripture as conveying what is limited in application to its original context. Instead of Scripture relaying what is normative, it relays that which is culture-bound. The crucial question to be asked in discerning between the time-bound and the eternal is, "How can we locate and identify this permanent element or essence?"<sup>72</sup> This view assumes that Scripture is time-bound, not that which conveys what is basically normative.

The third recommendation mediates between the first two. Instead of assuming that Scripture conveys either what is normative or what is culture-bound, it assumes neither. This view allows the criteria to make this decision. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard write,

We detect problems, however, with both of these views. The former [Scripture conveys what is cultural] makes it difficult to establish the timelessness even of fundamental moral principles such as prohibitions against theft or murder; the latter [Scripture conveys what is normative] would seem to require us to greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Thes 5:26) or drink wine for upset stomachs (1 Tim 5:23).<sup>73</sup>

All three recommendations take seriously the need to

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<sup>70</sup>McQuilkin, "Normativeness" 230.

<sup>71</sup>William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 316.

<sup>72</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 1:120.

<sup>73</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 410.

distinguish between what is permanent and what is transient. Yet the suggestion that Scripture conveys what is culture-bound (recommendation two) does not harmonize with Paul's significant statement in 2 Tim 3:16. Recommendations one and three both recognize the importance of this verse in their view. Knight, who agrees with McQuilkin that Scripture relays what is normative, has this to say about the thesis set forth by McQuilkin:

In positing such a thesis, he is articulating the same absolute and universal language that the apostle Paul has used in asserting the Scripture's comprehensive didactic significance (2 Tim. 3:16). Since Christ's apostle indicates that this is true of *all* Scripture, then only it itself can teach us what it regards as limited and not universally normative.<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, the third recommendation (that criteria determines what is normative or cultural) regards 2 Tim 3:16 as crucial to its formulation. Representatives of this position declare,

With 2 Tim 3:16 and related texts, we affirm that every passage (a meaningful unit of discourse that makes one or more points that can be restated, if necessary, in a proposition) has some normative value for believers in all times and places. But we presuppose nothing about whether the application for us today will come by preserving unchanged the specific elements of the passage or whether we will have to identify broader principles that suggest unique applications for new contexts. Instead we ask a series of questions of the text.<sup>75</sup>

The caveat offered in the last portion of the above quotation is what distinguishes this view from the position that Scripture presents what is normative. The distinction is that those who take Scripture as normative suggest "both the form and meaning of Scripture are permanent revelation and normative,"<sup>76</sup> but those who let the criteria determine what is normative accept the meaning as normative, but not the form. Elaborating on this difference, Larkin provides insight into why taking both the form and meaning of Scripture as normative is

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<sup>74</sup>George W. Knight, III, "A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. by Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 243.

<sup>75</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 410-11.

<sup>76</sup>McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness" 222.

the best position:

The obvious reason for adopting the more comprehensive position affirming both form and meaning is that it best upholds the full authority of Scripture and to the same extent that Scripture itself does.<sup>77</sup>

The second question "What methodology should be followed to distinguish what is normative from what is cultural in Scripture?"<sup>78</sup> finds its answer in two primary methodologies that are foundational, but work from different perspectives, the ones proposed by McQuilkin<sup>79</sup> and Johnson.<sup>80</sup> Since the answer to the first question has ruled out Johnson's initial assumption that Scripture is culture-bound, it is unnecessary to review his proposal. Since Scripture conveys what is normative, McQuilkin's list is best in reflecting how to

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<sup>77</sup>Larkin, *Culture* 315.

<sup>78</sup>The importance, as well as the difficulty, of the question is seen in the many suggested methodologies. The cited references are just a sample of what is available: Bacchiocchi, *Women* 147; Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 66-68; Alan F. Johnson, "A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. by Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 279-80; Kaiser, "Legitimate" 142-44; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 411-21; Larkin, *Culture* 354-356; McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness" 230-36; Grant R. Osborne, *Hermeneutical* 328-29; David M. Scholer, "Unseasonable Thoughts on the State of Biblical Hermeneutics: Reflections of a New Testament Exegete," *American Baptist Quarterly* 2 (June 1983):139-40; Robert C. Sproul, "Controversy at Culture Gap," *Eternity* (May 1976):14-15, 40; Michael F. Stitzinger, "Cultural Confusion and the Role of Women in the Church: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:8-14," *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 4 (Fall 1988):36-38; Terrance Tiessen, "Toward a Hermeneutic for Discerning Universal Moral Absolutes" *JETS* 36 (June 1993):192-203; David P. Kuske, "What in Scripture is Universally Applicable and What is Historically Conditioned?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91 (Spring 1994):83-105.

<sup>79</sup>McQuilkin, "Problem of Normativeness" 230-36. Knight is in substantial agreement with McQuilkin ("Response" 243-253; idem, "From Hermeneutics to Practice: Scriptural Normativity and Culture, Revisited," *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* 12 [Fall 1986]:93-104), as is Larkin (*Culture*, 354-56).

<sup>80</sup>Johnson, "Response" 279-80. The cited article is a response to the list offered by McQuilkin. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard state that their list shares important similarities with Johnson, but is by no means identical with it (*Biblical Interpretation* 411). For an evaluation of the two foundational methodologies, see Larkin, *Culture*, 114-25.

determine what is normative as opposed to cultural.<sup>81</sup> To discern this, the interpreter must ask the following questions: (1) Does the context limit the recipient or application? (2) Does subsequent revelation limit the recipient or the application? (3) Is this specific teaching in conflict with other biblical teaching?<sup>82</sup> (4) Is the reason for a norm given in Scripture, and is that reason treated as normative? (5) Is the specific teaching normative as well as the principle? (6) Does the Bible treat the historic context as normative? (7) Does the Bible treat the cultural context as limited?<sup>83</sup>

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF PATRIARCHAL AND SEXIST TEXTS

Another hermeneutical mark of evangelical feminism is its detection of patriarchal and sexist texts in the Bible. The loudest advocate of this principle is Scholer, who writes, "Evangelical feminist hermeneutics must face patriarchal and sexist texts and assumptions within biblical passages and understand them precisely as limited texts and assumptions."<sup>84</sup>

The sample texts that Scholer sees as reflecting patriarchy, androcentrism, and possibly misogyny are: Rev 14:1-5; 1 Tim 5:3-16; 1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:24. Concerning Rev 14:1-5 he states:

I submit that most of us have never really noticed how dramatically androcentric the text is: the redeemed are men, explicitly men. Nor do I think that most of us have noticed the sexual or sexuality assumptions behind the text: men who have not defiled themselves with women. This is a view of sexuality that most of us would like to explain away or ignore. It is a view rooted in the reality of the ancient world that women

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<sup>81</sup>The preference of McQuilkin's list is not to reject wholesale the lists provided by others, especially Tiessen, "Toward a Hermeneutic" 193-207; Larkin, *Culture* 354-56; Kuske, "What in Scripture" 99-105; and Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 411-21.

<sup>82</sup>A caveat to this question would be to add the words "my understanding of," so that the questions reads "Is my understanding of this specific teaching in conflict with other Biblical teaching?" (Knight, "Response" 247).

<sup>83</sup>For a complete discussion of this list, see McQuilkin, "Problem of Normativeness" 230-36.

<sup>84</sup>David M. Scholer, "Contours of an Evangelical Feminist Hermeneutics," *Catalyst* 15 (April 1989):4. See also: idem, "Feminist Hermeneutics" 413-17; idem, "Participation in the Issues of Women and Ministry in the New Testament," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 15 (1988):103-4.

were always understood to be the one primarily to blame for sexual sin. This view has haunted the question of rape even to this day.<sup>85</sup>

His comments on 1 Tim 5:3-16 are along the same lines.

I submit again that the assumption behind this view is a view of sexuality that probably none of us really share or would admit to sharing. Again, it is rooted in the assumption that women are sexually irresponsible. If a 59-year-old or younger widow does not remarry, the odds are very great that she will follow Satan.<sup>86</sup>

The nature of these texts leads Scholer to the conclusion that they are limited texts and assumptions which reflect the historical-cultural realities from and in which Biblical texts arose.<sup>87</sup> In essence, this hermeneutical principle helps him to affirm evangelical feminism by limiting the passages that speak against it.

Such a perspective toward the identified texts has several problems. First, it implies that the Bible cannot be interpreted in a regular fashion because of its male authorship.<sup>88</sup>

Second, it adds a further dimension to the historical aspect of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation, i.e., that the interpreter concern himself or herself with and know about the biases of the author. This is information that requires much guesswork on the part of the exegete.

A third reason to reject this principle as a valid hermeneutical rule is that it presents a writer of Scripture, such as Paul, in a contradictory light. On one hand, he advocates the full equality of men and women (cf. Gal 3:28), but on the other, he capitulates to societal norms and writes from a sexist position (cf. 1 Tim 5:3-16).

Furthermore, Scholer's stance assumes an evangelical feminist presuppositional perspective of the Old and New Testaments. He labels certain passages as sexist and patriarchal because an egalitarian position on the role of women in the church and home is a foregone conclusion.

Finally, a patriarchal culture does not necessarily mandate an improper view toward women. Poythress is helpful in this area when he states,

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<sup>85</sup>Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics" 414.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 415.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 419.

<sup>88</sup>Kassian, *Women* 144.

Note also that the patriarchy of OT and NT cultures did not necessarily exclude women from ever occupying a role of social and religious prominence. Prov 31 illustrates the breadth of scope possible even in ordinary circumstances. Moreover, Esther was a queen. Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Isaiah's wife were prophetesses (Exod 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Isa 8:3). Deborah judged Israel (though this role functioned to rebuke the inadequate male leaders: Judges 4:8-9; Isa 3:12). Salome Alexandra, wife of Alexander Jannaeus, ruled over the Jews from 76 to 67 B.C. Women played an important role in Jesus' earthly ministry and as witnesses to his resurrection. Lydia, Priscilla, Phoebe, and others obviously had significant roles.<sup>89</sup>

### RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

This completes the evaluation of seven major principles that distinguish the hermeneutics of evangelical feminism from those of hierarchialists and, in many cases, from the grammatico-historical approach to interpreting Scripture.<sup>90</sup> This evaluation has shown the weaknesses of the hermeneutics of evangelical feminism. An *ad hoc* hermeneutic that limits the teaching of 1 Tim 2:11-15 is inadequate, because it fails to consider both the purpose of 1 Timothy and the *ad hoc* nature of other Pauline epistles. Any attempt to establish one passage as the interpretive grid for all other passages is inconsistent with two standard tenets of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation: the plenary inspiration of Scripture and the necessary harmonization of texts. The principle of the analogy of faith is valid, but not when it is brought into the interpretation process too early, as evangelical feminists tend to do.

Furthermore, to parallel the role of women with the role of slaves is to assume that God ordained slavery, a teaching not found in Scripture. The role of women has its roots in the order of creation, however (Genesis 2). To argue that objective interpretation is a myth and that the Bible contains sexist and patriarchal texts is to differ again from the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. This preferred procedure for understanding Scripture has argued that objective interpretation is possible and that it is not necessary for the interpreter

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<sup>89</sup>Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Two Hermeneutical Tensions" 7.

<sup>90</sup>The scope of this essay does not permit a consideration of other areas, such as the relationship between didactic and descriptive passages, Pauline use of the Old Testament, and the use of logic in understanding 1 Tim 2:8-15.

to be concerned with and knowledgeable of "the biases" of the author.

Finally, evangelical feminists are correct in observing that certain biblical texts are cultural. Yet their procedure for determining which ones is questionable. In light of 2 Tim 3:16-17, it is best to consider all Scripture as normative, unless answers to the above questions presented by McQuilkin prove otherwise.

Evangelical feminists must take a hard look at their hermeneutics in view of evident weaknesses in the system. Many of these shortcomings contradict the grammatico-historical method of interpretation. Since these defects are present, then the position of evangelical feminism on the role of men and women in the church and home rests on less than a solid biblical foundation.