
Patriarchy

If we are to discern the underlying forms of moral logic that shape sexual ethics in Scripture, we cannot avoid the question of patriarchy, the cultural pattern in which males are assumed to be dominant and females are expected to be submissive. Although examples of this cultural pattern appear throughout Scripture, there are also countervailing movements toward a more egalitarian vision. One central challenge for understanding Scripture's approach to gender lies in discerning the relationship between these different streams within the biblical witness — and their interrelationship. Is patriarchy not only normal, but normative? And do the egalitarian examples in Scripture function as unusual exceptions, or is there a movement in the canon away from patriarchy and toward a more egalitarian vision? In this chapter I will explore these contrasting themes regarding patriarchy, and I will identify some criteria that can illumine their interrelationship. I will then address the broader question of the use of seemingly patriarchal texts in giving specific content and focus to the overarching category of “gender complementarity” in Scripture. After discerning the essential canonical themes and movements in this area, I will conclude this chapter by considering the implications of this analysis for the church's debate on same-sex unions.

Patriarchy and Egalitarianism: Contrasting Streams in the Creation Narratives

Contrasting streams regarding patriarchy appear already in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2, especially when we view these texts in their

wider canonical context. On the one hand, 1 Timothy 2:13 seems to assume, based on the creation accounts, that the submission of women arises from the fact that “Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Priority in creation is assumed in that text to be equivalent to dominance. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 11:8 seems to link Paul’s demand that women cover their heads (a sign, for Paul, of the subordination of female to male, according to some interpreters) with the fact that Genesis 2 shows that “man was not made from woman, but woman from man.” Here again, the priority of the male in the creation account and the seeming portrayal of female as derivative from male can be used to bolster patriarchal assumptions about the relationship between the genders and the role of head coverings in symbolizing that relationship.

But despite these attempts of New Testament writers to find a basis for certain forms of patriarchy in the creation narratives, we must also note the remarkable egalitarian motifs that appear in the creation stories themselves. The Genesis narrative tells us twice that both male and female are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; 5:1-2). As I have noted in chapter 2, this portrayal underscores the *equality* of men and women before God and in their relationship to the rest of creation. Moreover, as I also noted above, the account of the creation of woman in Genesis 2 places the emphasis on the *similarity* of men and women — that is, over against the rest of the animal world. It is not until after the Fall, in Genesis 3:16, that we find explicit discussion about patriarchy: “To the woman [God] said, ‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” The parallel use of the same Hebrew words for “desire” (*teshoqah*) and “rule” (*mashal*) in Genesis 4:7 suggests that the “desire” in Genesis 3:16 is the desire for mastery, and the husband’s “rule” derives not from gracious concern but from greater strength.¹ Therefore, Genesis 3:16 portrays patriarchy not as grounded in *creation*, but in the conflicted relationship between men and women resulting from the *Fall*.

Contrasting Streams in the Old Testament

This tension between patriarchal and egalitarian streams continues throughout the canon. Patriarchal assumptions appear throughout the

1. Genesis 4:7 declares: “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire [*teshoqah*] is for you, but you must master [*mashal*] it.”

rest of the Old Testament, sometimes in obvious — sometimes in subtle — ways. The Hebrew word for “become a husband” (*ba'al*) also means “to be master” or “to rule.” Women in the Old Testament do not decide to marry; they are “given in marriage” by their fathers, who receive a bride price in return. Women do not normally inherit property. They may not divorce their husbands, though their husbands may divorce them (Deut. 24:1-4). Wives are thus clearly subject to their husbands in almost every instance. Moreover, the higher valuation of men over women is evident in more subtle ways. According to Leviticus 12, a woman’s time of ritual impurity after bearing a baby girl is twice as long as her time of impurity after bearing a baby boy. Throughout the Old Testament, women have fewer rights than men; they often are regarded as having less value in Israelite society; they are frequently regarded as a dangerous source of potential contamination or ritual impurity; and they rarely exercise any form of public leadership.

Nevertheless, though ancient Israel was indeed deeply patriarchal, the stories of Israel’s history show remarkable moments when, despite those dominant patterns, women exercised significant public leadership. A number of examples offer striking evidence of a movement in significant contrast to the dominant patriarchal assumptions in the Old Testament. Miriam, sister of Moses, is described as a prophet (Exod. 15:20): she is portrayed in Micah 6:4 as one of Israel’s judges and deliverers, and she was clearly understood as a leader. Deborah is another female prophet who appears in the narrative as “judging Israel” (Judg. 4:4-5). Huldah is yet another prophet consulted in matters of importance to the entire state by King Josiah (2 Kings 22:12-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28). Her role is even more striking when we note that there were other male prophets also functioning during this time period, including the prophet Zephaniah, whose work is recorded in one of the books of the Hebrew canon. The fact that these stories are remembered and included at all within the canonical witness suggests that, already in ancient Israel, patriarchy is not conceived in absolute terms, and more importantly, that there is an implicit recognition in Scripture that God raises up both men and women as leaders for the covenant people, often in contrast to traditional societal expectations.

How should these countervailing currents in the Old Testament be understood in relationship to each other? Is patriarchy in the Old Testament not only normal but also normative, and are the isolated instances of women in leadership merely illustrations of a breakdown in male leadership, pointing to the failure of God’s people to fulfill their divinely ap-

pointed roles?² Or should we take these exceptions as glimpses, already at this early point in Israel's history, of the first movements toward an egalitarian vision hinted at in the creation story?³ In order to answer these questions, at least from a canonical perspective, we must turn to the ways patriarchy is treated in the New Testament in order to discern whether we see the kind of canonical movement that illustrates an emerging trajectory toward a more egalitarian position, or whether patriarchy is simply a norm despite a number of minor exceptions to the rule.

Contrasting Streams in the New Testament

At first glance, we see the same juxtaposition of patriarchal and egalitarian motifs in the New Testament. There are numerous examples of exhortation that look solidly patriarchal in character. The apostle Paul urges that women should cover their heads in public (1 Cor. 11:2-16), and insists, "Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man" (1 Cor. 11:9). Several chapters later, he argues that women should be silent in the congregations, and that they should ask their husbands at home if they want to learn anything, insisting that "it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Ephesians 5:33 directs that "a wife should respect [literally "fear"] her husband," and the same text directs wives to be subject to their husbands as they are to the Lord (Eph. 5:22; cf. Col. 3:18). Similarly, Titus 2:5 focuses women on their roles within the household, and urges them to be submissive to their husbands — "so that the word of God may not be discredited." In the same way, 1 Peter 3:1 directs wives: "Accept the authority of your husbands." Finally — and perhaps most emphatically — 1 Timothy 2:11-15 instructs a woman to "learn in silence, with full submission." The writer declares: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man," making an appeal to the creation narrative to provide a warrant for that instruction. I will explore all these texts in more detail in the coming pages, but for now it is sufficient to note the common patriarchal theme that runs through all of them.

2. For a summary of these kinds of arguments, see Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991).

3. For counterarguments to the text cited above, see Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005).

For many — on both the theological right and the left — these texts are straightforward: the Bible simply assumes the same patriarchal social structure throughout: men exercise authority in a variety of ways, and women submit themselves to that authority. For some on the right, this represents an ongoing norm to which members of the church should continue to devote themselves. For some on the left, this represents yet another aspect of the ancient world that we have grown past and must leave behind — similar to the Bible's acceptance of slavery or its prohibitions against usury. They feel that we must recognize that the church has grown past such ancient assumptions and that we must focus instead on broader biblical principles such as justice and love.

But both of these approaches can too easily miss the countervailing currents that operate within the New Testament, which call into question whether a simple patriarchy represents the totality of the witness of the New Testament. We see this, first of all, in the tendency I have noted already in the Old Testament: the striking portrayal of stories and statements that seem to move against the patriarchal ideal. This same tendency appears even more prominently in the New Testament, right along with the seemingly patriarchal statements we have already seen.

Consider the many cases throughout the New Testament in which women appear in significant positions of leadership and wield notable authority in the life of the early church. The book of Acts says that women are among those included with the eleven meeting in Jerusalem at the very beginning of the church, even before Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14). This means that women were among those speaking in tongues at the first Pentecost, as attested by Acts 2:17-21. This public manifestation of the presence of the Spirit is not limited to men. Indeed, Peter's sermon on Pentecost cites Joel 2:28-32, which speaks explicitly of women as prophets and recipients of the Spirit: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17). Old divisions between rich and poor, and between men and women, are overcome: "Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18). From the very beginning, Luke's story narrates a powerful new movement that includes women in significant ways, publicly addressing the community and speaking for God.

The same pattern continues throughout the book of Acts. Women often hosted churches in their homes: Mary, the mother of John Mark, is so described in Acts 12:12; Lydia is another, the first convert in Europe and a successful businesswoman (Acts 16:14-15, 40). In a culture where few had

homes of adequate size to host a meeting, such hosts/hostesses were recognized leaders and benefactors for the entire community. The two women Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi appear to have played a prominent role within that community in Philippians 4:2-3. Otherwise, why does Paul include the very public request that they agree? Paul says that they "have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers." This sounds very much like the two of them occupy prominent and leading positions in the life of the church.⁴

We also see other striking and important roles for women, particularly in light of the patriarchal background so prominent elsewhere in the Bible. The four daughters of Philip are introduced as prophets (Acts 21:9). Priscilla (and her husband, Aquila) were apparently widely known (Rom. 16:3-4) and hosted a local church (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5). The two of them together give gentle correction to Apollos in his teaching (Acts 18:26). Luke and Paul almost always mention Priscilla first, then Aquila. She is referred to as a "co-worker" in Romans 16:3-4, a technical term, as I have noted, that Paul uses for others in positions of leadership. In a similar vein, a number of women are referred to in Romans 16 as "workers in the Lord": Mary (v. 6), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (v. 12), and Persis (v. 12). In Romans 16:7, Junia is clearly referred to as an "apostle," indicating that she is involved in the proclamation of the gospel and the planting of new churches.⁵ Phoebe, in Romans 16:1-2, is a *diakonos* (translated as "deacon," or perhaps "minister") and is also spoken of as a *prostotes* (translated as "benefactor," "patron," or "protector").⁶ Such persons carried enormous public respect in

4. The following persons are called "co-workers": Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-4); Urbanus (Rom. 16:9); Timothy (Rom. 16:21); Apollos (1 Cor. 3:6-9); Titus (2 Cor. 8:23); Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25); Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:3); Jesus called Justus (Col. 4:11); Timothy (1 Thess. 3:2); Philemon (Philem. 1:1); Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (Philem. 1:24). Clearly, the term refers to those in leadership positions.

5. A number of later copyists were apparently scandalized by this and changed the accent on the feminine name *Junia* to reflect the masculine name *Junias*, supposedly an abbreviated form of the more common Junianus. But this abbreviated masculine form has no other attestation, and the feminine form occurs more than 250 times in Greek and Latin inscriptions found in Rome alone. (See the discussion in Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., [London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1994], p. 475). There can be little doubt that the feminine form is the original reading.

6. Even the New International Version, fairly traditional in general on gender issues, translates the Greek word *diakonos* as "minister" in four passages: 1 Cor. 3:6; Col. 1:7, 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:6.

the ancient world. Note the implicit authority that Phoebe wields, so that Paul asks the Romans to help her in whatever she may “require” from them.

Those who want to insist that the Bible requires women never to exercise authority publicly over men are forced into some striking exegetical gymnastics to account for this direct evidence of women in leadership in the New Testament texts. Some of them attempt to distinguish public from private exercise of authority, claiming that women only exercised authority privately. But the New Testament documents are all public documents, and the discussion of women in leadership positions in these documents is necessarily a discussion of public leadership. Others have attempted to build on the dissertation of Wayne Grudem, who has argued that prophecy in the New Testament is not a public and authoritative office, and thus that at least the presence of women prophets does not violate patriarchal assumptions.⁷ Yet such arguments seem strained at best. Ephesians 2:20 pairs apostles and prophets together as the “foundation” of the entire New Testament church; Ephesians 3:6 speaks again of this foundational revelation being disclosed to “apostles and prophets” by the Spirit. Prophets are here clearly considered to occupy a public and authoritative office, directly alongside that of apostles. But even if one were to grant some consideration to Grudem’s thesis, that prophecy is (at least in some cases) subject to the discernment of elders, we still must account for why women are standing up in public and proclaiming the word of the Lord at all! Prophecy is, by its very nature, a public activity, and insofar as it is the word of God that is being proclaimed, it is authoritative. If, in some cases, others were called on to discern the authenticity of the prophetic word, this does not diminish the public and authoritative role of the prophet herself. Surely, the proclamation of the gospel on the day of Pentecost, by both men and women, was a public and authoritative exercise of Spirit-endowed prophetic speech.

So far, we have seen a number of New Testament texts that seem to give prescriptive advice or direction to women — based on patriarchal assumptions. But we have also seen a wide range of texts that bear witness to women in prominent positions of leadership, a practice that violates patriarchal assumptions that a woman’s place is never in public leadership. How are we to resolve such tensions?

7. See the more recently updated version of his dissertation: Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).

Resolving the Tensions

We begin to find our way through this maze by looking more broadly at the portrayal of women in the New Testament. Consider the ministry of Jesus: in a variety of ways, Jesus stood apart from the patriarchal assumptions of his day. He allowed menstruating women to touch him (Mark 5:25-34), and didn't seem worried about any kind of defilement, despite the warnings about such contact in Leviticus 15:19. He allowed a woman to let her hair down in public and to kiss his feet (Luke 7:36-50), a shocking act in that culture but an act that Jesus wholeheartedly defended. He counted women among his followers, and they were present with him at many key junctures in his ministry, including listening to his teaching in the house of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), a place for women that was unthinkable in the synagogue of Jesus' day. Women are portrayed as the last to remain with him at the cross and the first to witness his resurrection — against the prevailing Jewish assumption that only males were reliable witnesses.

We also see in the teaching of Jesus a number of motifs that militate against the traditional patriarchal assumptions of his day. Perhaps most importantly, Jesus clearly placed loyalty to family below loyalty to himself and to God, thereby calling into question the basic structures of society that were built around the order of patriarchal households. He declared that anyone who loved father or mother more than him was not worthy of him (Matt. 10:37). He pronounced a blessing on those who left behind all family ties for the sake of discipleship (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:29; Luke 14:26). Matthew records Jesus' forbidding his disciples to call anyone "father" (Matt. 23:9), thereby calling into question the entire social structure of patriarchy that singles out paternal males for particular honor. Finally, Jesus taught that "in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35). This saying effectively takes one's location in traditional family structures and removes it from one's core identity. In the resurrection, the ongoing task of raising up the next generation (and thus all the social structures required for this procreative enterprise) is no longer needed, and therefore no longer present. If there is no marriage in the resurrection, then there is no differentiation of the roles that constitute marriage, including the subjection of women. One's eternal identity is thus decisively severed from patriarchal structures and relationships.

The Place of Galatians 3:27-28

It is in this light that we must read the most sweeping text in the New Testament on the question of patriarchy, Galatians 3:27-28: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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." Most Christians are quite familiar with the first of these pairings: "in Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek." The book of Acts and the letters of Paul devote a great deal of attention to the way the early church was led to set aside various parts of the Old Testament law as applicable to Gentiles (i.e., "Greeks"), particularly the requirements of circumcision, Sabbath observance, and kosher eating. What is not as commonly recognized is the function of the last two pairings: "[T]here is neither slave nor free; there is no longer male and female." Yet Jesus' words declaring that there is no marriage in the resurrection gives us an important clue about why these pairings are included here. Early Christians understood that they had already begun to partake in the life of the coming eschatological age (though they also recognized that the coming age had not yet fully arrived). It is this eschatological existence — an existence that already begins to embrace the life of the world to come — that Paul speaks about here. In this new life, old distinctions of Jew and Gentile no longer have any ultimate meaning. The same is true for slave and free, and for male and female.

But why these last two in particular? Why does the life to come exclude the differentiations of slave and free and the coupling of male and female?⁸ We begin to grasp the significance of these last two when we look at Aristotle's *Politics*, a window into the way people in the ancient world understood society in its most basic terms.⁹ Aristotle begins that work by talking about the essential elements of any form of human community or part-

8. It is important to note the slight difference in Paul's conjunctions in Gal. 3:27-28: "There is no longer slave *or* free, there is no longer male *and* female." In the age to come, the difference between slave and free ceases to exist entirely. With respect to male and female, the emphasis shifts to the *coupling* of male and female that passes away (in keeping with Jesus' words about the absence of marriage in the resurrection). Gender *identity* does not necessarily disappear, but gender *roles*, at least insofar as they are defined by marriage, no longer exist in the age to come.

9. Aristotle was an early tutor of Alexander the Great, whose military machine created the first empire that encompassed the entire known world in the fourth century BCE, an empire later taken over and administered by Rome prior to the emergence of Christianity.

nership. The two most basic and essential elements of any form of human community are evident already in the family: "the union of male and female for the continuance of the species" (i.e., the procreative relationship) and "the union of natural ruler and natural subject for the sake of security" (i.e., the relationships of master and slave).¹⁰ In other words, in the ancient world the divisions of humanity into slave and free and the coupling of male and female were considered the essential and primal building blocks of every form of human society. For Jews, these two primal divisions in human society were supplemented by a third — and equally basic — division in the ordering of the world: the distinction between Jew and Gentile that was established by God to single out the covenant people as recipients of his blessing on behalf of the world. It is also important to note that each of these relationships was also marked by the difference between superior and inferior, between insider and outsider, between greater power and lesser power.

It is against this backdrop that we can sense the radical nature of the text of Galatians 3:27-28. Here Paul is probably citing an early baptismal formula (note the reference to baptism in 3:27). We see a similar statement — linked to baptism and proclaiming the end of the fundamental divisions that make up society as the ancient world understood it — in Colossians 3:10: "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!"¹¹ In both statements, life in Christ is presented as a foretaste of the new age, when old structures have disappeared and society is centered only on Christ as the source of the whole creation's life and being. It is not surprising, then, that in that same letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks about the cross, "by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). The whole world as Paul knew it had come to an end. The gospel of Christ entails nothing less than a radical eschatological reordering of society as a whole. Paul goes on to conclude: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is every-

10. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (London/New York: W. Heinemann/Putnam, 1932), §1252a.

11. "Scythians" were understood in the ancient world as the most barbaric and uncivilized people of all. See Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 170. Interestingly, in the same section cited in the preceding note, Aristotle also notes "barbarians" as a corporate embodiment of servitude, destined by nature to be ruled by the Greeks. In other words, in this Colossians text the two basic pairings are Jew-Gentile and master-slave.

thing!" (Gal. 6:15) In that "new creation" there is not merely forgiveness and reconciliation to God; there is also a new social order in which there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female.

Here we discover substantial emphases within the New Testament witness that sweep away, in categorical terms, those basic distinctions between insider and outsider, between powerful and powerless, as well as the distinctive pairing (male and female) devoted to procreation — all the distinctions that form the basis for the structures of society as it was known in the ancient world. One can readily see this theme as part of the same fabric as the many texts we noted above, in which women were exercising significant leadership, in a variety of ways, in the life of the church. These texts should be placed alongside some others in which Jews and Gentiles are eating together in table fellowship, and also perhaps alongside Paul's letter to Philemon, where he urges Philemon to receive back his slave Onesimus — "no longer [as] a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother" in Christ (Philem. 1:16). We see glimpses, throughout the New Testament, where the reality envisioned by Galatians 3:27-28 has begun to break into the experience of the Christian community.

Revisiting the New Testament Patriarchal Texts

Yet this same New Testament also seems, as we have noted, to assume patriarchal relationships in many places. Wives are instructed to respect and submit to their husbands; women are told to cover their heads (1 Cor. 11:3-16); to be silent (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11); and not to attempt to boss men around (1 Tim. 2:12). This sounds as if the patriarchal structures of this world are very much in place in the life of the New Testament church. How are we to justify these two strikingly different elements of the New Testament witness?

Those who wish to argue that patriarchal relationships should continue today, at least in some modified form, often move quickly to emphasize the *spiritual* equality that all believers have by virtue of faith in Christ, whether they are Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. Yet they argue that this spiritual equality does not eliminate the specific role distinctions that God intends for life in this world. For example, S. Lewis Johnson says: "In the context of Galatians, the apostle simply affirms that every believer in Christ inherits fully the Abrahamic promises by grace apart from

legal works.”¹² But it is difficult to see what connection exists between Johnson’s “legal works” and the pairings of slave-free and male-female. This fails as an exegesis of the entire verse, addressing only the Jew-Greek distinction. Nor does this entire line of emphasis give us any clear understanding of the nature and character of social relationships in the “new creation” of which Paul speaks in Galatians 6:15.

I believe that a more helpful approach is to emphasize the eschatological nature of the affirmation in Galatians 3:27-28 and similar passages — that is, their grounding in the life of the world to come. These texts are describing the same reality of which Jesus speaks when he declares that “in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35). Galatians 3:27-28 describes the destiny of all Christians, a destiny initiated in baptism but experienced in this life only in glimpses and foretastes of a kind of life that is yet to come in all its fullness.

This brings us to a vitally important and broad New Testament motif: the dynamic interaction between the “already” and the “not yet” of Christian existence. (The theological term for this discussion is eschatology, the study of last things in relation to our present existence.) In many New Testament texts there is a sense that we have already “been raised with Christ” (Col. 3:1) and are “seated . . . with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). *Already* now, resurrection life starts to break into present experience; *already* Christians are discovering a deeper family than simply the connections of blood and kinship, and they begin to address each other as “brother” and “sister”; *already* the first apostles declare to earthly authorities that they “must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29); *already* the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, without making distinctions between male and female, between young and old, or between slave and free (Acts 2:17-18); *already* some Christians are invited to remain single rather than becoming married, preparing for a “coming distress”; and we are *already* entering into the life to come (1 Cor. 7). Paul summarizes this “already” side of the picture in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31:

²⁹I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those

12. In Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, p. 163.

who buy as though they had no possessions,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

However, this emphasis on the “already” of Christian existence, with its awareness that the new creation is already breaking into life in this world, is only half of the picture. The other half is the “not yet” of New Testament eschatology. Although Christians begin to taste this new life of the age to come, they still experience the reality of this present world as well. They still experience suffering and death. Slaves still have earthly masters who expect them to obey orders. Jews and Gentiles still struggle to understand each other and to learn how to live together. Husbands and wives must still find ways to relate to each other and forge their common life, and to care for the children whom God has given them. Despite the fact that the apostles “must obey God rather than human authority,” they still find themselves forced to deal with human authorities who do not always like what the apostles are doing, and who may persecute them for their beliefs and actions. Christians live in hope, awaiting the fullness of God’s redemption, which is “not yet” — still lying in the future. Paul writes in Romans 8:24-25: “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” We still await aspects of our redemption that we do not yet see.

But this “already/not yet” tension was no easier for Christians in the ancient world to grasp than it is for us to understand. One of the characteristic problems that many New Testament writers grappled with arose from misunderstandings of this eschatological tension. It seems particularly evident that many early Christians grabbed onto the happy and hopeful “already” side of the picture and ran with it, ignoring the less appealing “not yet” side. We see this, for example, in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, where he addresses a host of pastoral problems. The Corinthians were enthusiastic about their Christianity: there was an abundance of what we would call “charismatic” activity — speaking in tongues, prophesying, miracles, and so forth. Anything that would be a tremendous display of spiritual power caught their attention. But this enthusiasm was also accompanied by a number of serious problems. The community was dividing itself into groups that were pitted against each other, claiming “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 1:10-13). This was accompanied by a kind of pride in their own spiritual accomplishments (1 Cor. 12-14). At the same time, there was a disturbing indifference to the

needs of others. They refused to deal with one member who was in an apparently incestuous relationship (1 Cor. 5:1-5), and they showed a disturbing greed and lack of concern for the poor at their meal celebrations (1 Cor. 11:21-22). We also see a fascination with ascetic practices in some: those who were seemingly concerned to detach themselves from bodily existence, especially avoiding marriage, probably because they claimed to be participating in the life of the coming kingdom already. Meanwhile, others in the community saw no problems with having sex with prostitutes, perhaps also claiming that they had already transcended earthly existence and thus what they did with their bodies was irrelevant to their spiritual lives (1 Cor. 6:13-20).

Many scholars suggest that a common thread weaving its way through all these pastoral problems was a lack of eschatological balance.¹³ The Corinthians were enamored of Paul's gospel of a new reality breaking into this world; however, the problem was that they dissolved the "already/not yet" tension and converted this temporal tension into a dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. They thought that, because they had already entered the spiritual realm, their bodies were essentially matters of indifference, and that bodily structures of this world were irrelevant to true spirituality. Spirituality had become for them exclusively a matter of the "already," as it was understood *spiritually*. Paul's ironic rejoinder seems to illuminate the problem:

⁸Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! ⁹For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. ¹⁰We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, ¹²and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. ¹⁴I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. (1 Cor. 4:8-14)

13. See, e.g., the discussion in Johan Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 163ff.

Paul here contrasts the triumphalism of the Corinthians with the suffering example of the apostles. Christian faith is not about transcending and escaping the troubles of this world, but about the sacrificial offering of lives to one another in hope and love. It is the “not yet” side of the “already/not yet” tension — the embrace of suffering and sacrificial love — that the Corinthians are missing. They need to remember that the resurrection still lies before them (see 1 Cor. 15:12-23).¹⁴

So how does all this inform our understanding of Galatians 3:27-28 and the curious tension between texts such as this one, in which all gender distinctions seem to be obliterated, and those other texts that urge the submission of women and slaves, the wearing of head coverings, and the like? As I have already observed, we see the “already” of Galatians 3:27-28 lived out in all kinds of surprising ways in the life of the early church. Women hosted churches; they were deacons/ministers, co-workers, workers in the Lord, apostles, and prophets. But a closer look at the Corinthian correspondence begins to show the tensions we have been exploring. It appears that much of the New Testament’s patriarchal language arose in instances where women were claiming a radical new sort of freedom based on their understanding of their participation in the new creation in Christ. But those claims to freedom were sometimes disrupting the life of the Christian community in noteworthy ways — and damaging the church’s witness to the wider community. In other words, the New Testament’s seemingly patriarchal injunctions can be understood as various attempts to rein in imbalances in the “already/not yet” tension of New Testament eschatology.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

For example, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 assumes that women are praying and prophesying in the public assembly, but the same text requires them to wear head coverings (or perhaps to wear their hair pinned above their head rather than hanging loosely). In a culture with at least some Jewish connections, where a woman’s exposing or letting down her hair was

14. Many commentators believe that Paul’s discussion of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 must be viewed against this backdrop. The Corinthians do not deny the resurrection because they doubt the power of God; they deny that there is a *future* resurrection, believing that whatever resurrection God intends has already happened to them.

laced with sexual overtones, it does not take much imagination to envision the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 11. Women were claiming a new kind of freedom that they believed belonged to them in their new Christian identity: they were standing up to pray and prophesy with hair down and flowing, providing plenty of titillation for some males, while their husbands may well have felt shamed because their wives were seeming to send signals of sexual availability to others rather than to them alone.¹⁵ In the midst of all of this, the worship of the community was in disarray, and the focus had shifted from God to much more human issues.¹⁶

Paul responds by reminding them that they have not yet fully transcended the structures of the old creation. He reasserts signs and markers of traditional gender roles, and he urges women not to expose or let their hair down in public worship. Yet it is also worth noting what Paul does *not* say. He does not forbid women from praying and prophesying; nor does he require them to be silent here. Moreover, even though he requires women to cover their hair by his appeal to the creation story and the priority of man in creation (1 Cor. 11:9), he follows this by a qualifying comment: "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" (1 Cor. 11:11-12). One gets the sense that the gender distinctions Paul is speaking of here have a pragmatic basis, not a deep or ontological basis, since Paul himself cites evidence that balances an overly patriarchal reading of his words.

In other words, for Paul, the family structures that are part of this world are indeed patriarchal; other forms of social organization within families were inconceivable in his day. To the extent that people participated in these structures, they needed to recognize the limits and roles that

15. Other commentators focus attention less on the sexual overtones of exposed long hair and more on the hypothesis that the Corinthians were engaging in the ancient equivalent of cross-dressing, with women dressing like men and vice versa. See Linda Belleville, "Κεφαλή and the Thorny Issue of Headcovering in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," in Margaret E. Thrall, Trevor J. Burke, and J. K. Elliott, eds., *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict; Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 215-32. In either case, the "bottom line" was a pragmatic one: what was perceived as inappropriate behavior for men and women had become a distraction from the worship of God.

16. Paul apparently feels that he can appeal to ordinary standards of decency and shame, which he expresses repeatedly (1 Cor. 11:5, 6, 13, and 14-15). Whatever Paul wants, it is probably consistent with conventional standards of propriety for men and women.

were required of them, particularly when failure to do so would disrupt communities and shame individuals. For Paul, the tension seems clear, though manageable: insofar as Christians still participate in family life, they are not yet, in this aspect of their lives, part of the new creation (in which families are left behind). Therefore, they need to recognize, within those contexts where families are in play, the responsibilities and roles that are appropriate to family life, which are grounded in the original creation. Yet even here, the new creation seeps in around the edges: women are praying and prophesying in public, and even Paul's citation of warrants for his instructions in the creation narrative (1 Cor. 11:7-9) is qualified by a recognition of the ultimate basis of mutuality and equality that marks the relationship between the sexes (1 Cor. 11:11-12).¹⁷

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

That mutuality between husband and wife is even more deeply expressed in a surprising text in 1 Corinthians 7 — which is about sex within marriage. Apparently, some Corinthian Christians were advocating that married couples should cease having sex, and that they should “already” participate in the gender-free life of the coming age. Paul strongly discourages such behavior, and then he makes the following comment in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4: “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 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.” Here we see a striking “merger” of the structures of this age and the coming one, in which the traditional patriarchal rights of husbands over the bodies of wives are severely curtailed, and yet the bodily intimacy of life in “this age” is deeply affirmed. It is precisely this capacity for living in that new tension that marks the distinctive genius of the New Testament's eschatological vision.

17. I recognize that there are a number of features of this text that I have not fully addressed, including the meaning of the “headship” of males, particularly in verse 3, as well as the difficult question of Paul's treatment of the image of God in men and women in 1 Cor. 11:7. As difficult as these questions are, however, I believe that Paul's discussion of them fits within the larger context and dynamics I have been describing. For further discussion of the relevant issues, see Gordon Fee's discussion of this passage in Pierce, Groothuis, and Fee, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, pp. 142-60.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-35

We see dynamics similar to 1 Corinthians 11 in Paul's injunction for women to be silent in the church in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35. Even though a number of scholars have raised considerable doubt about whether these verses are part of the original text of 1 Corinthians, they can be understood — albeit with some difficulty — within the larger context of the Corinthian correspondence.¹⁸ The central problem in this text is simple to describe, even if it is difficult to resolve. The text declares: "As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says." Yet, as I have just explored, 1 Corinthians 11 assumes that women *are* praying and prophesying, and chapter 11 is concerned only about how their hair looks as they do so. This means that the injunction for women to be silent in chapter 14 cannot be construed as absolute in its scope; it must be qualified in some way. But here is where opinions differ. Those who argue that Paul is teaching male leadership argue that the silence enjoined here is from public and authoritative speech or, more specifically, the oral weighing of prophecies by the leaders in the community.¹⁹ But the text by no means makes this connection clear, nor is it clear that "the others" mentioned in verse 29 who are to "weigh" the prophecies are the leaders in the community rather than simply the other prophets (a group that would, of course, include women).

A more natural interpretation builds on verse 35 in the text: "If there is anything they desire to know (or, more literally, "if they want to learn anything"), let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." This immediate context connects women's speaking not with "weighing" of prophecy, but rather with asking questions. In the culture of the biblical world, the asking of questions can be construed in many contexts as a contest for dominance.²⁰ This internal contextual clue suggests that the concern here focuses not on public

18. See the extensive discussion of the text-critical problems in Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

19. See Donald Carson's argument to this effect in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 151.

20. Cf. Job 15; 38:3; 40:7; Matt. 21:23ff.; 22:46; Mark 12:34; Luke 20:40; John 20:30. We see a similar concern for women seeking to "learn" by asking questions, apparently in an aggressive and/or wayward manner, in 1 Tim. 2:11 and 2 Tim. 3:7.

speech in general, but on seizing authority in inappropriate ways that challenge or shame others in the congregation. Verse 34, then, would seem to be saying that it is disgraceful for a woman to get up in church and challenge the authority of others publicly. Again, what we see, in context, is a refusal to allow the eschatological vision of Galatians 3:27-28 to be used in ways that disrupt the life of the community or shame others.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Turning to 1 Timothy 2:8-15, we see a similar pattern: curtailing the behavior of women who are aggressively disrupting the life of the community:

⁸I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; ⁹also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. ¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

In the first place, this text warns against the ostentatious display of wealth (braided hair, gold, pearls, and expensive clothes), which was a common way for wealthy women in the Greco-Roman world to establish their public status — but was inappropriate for the Christian community. Reading between the lines, one can sense the longing for status and recognition on the part of women in the Corinthian congregation whom Paul is addressing in this passage.

But we come to the heart of the problem in verses 11-12, with the call to women to “learn in silence with full submission,” and the text’s further instructions to women not “to teach or have authority over a man.” This appears, at first glance, to be a sweeping patriarchal text, grounded in the creation narrative, one that prohibits the instruction of men by women generally. But a closer look reveals a different picture. First, we must consider the call to “silence.” The translation “silent” for the Greek word *hēsuchia* is problematic: *hēsuchia* connotes centrally not silence but *calm*⁷

ness.²¹ The same Greek word (*hēsuchia*) is translated “quietly” in 2 Thessalonians 3:12. The focus is not centrally on the absence of speech, but on calmness, composure, and peaceableness. This suggests that the problem is not that women are speaking at all, but that they are doing so in an aggressive, agitated way — in the context of giving and receiving instruction (“Let a woman learn . . .”).²²

This line of interpretation is confirmed by the word in verse 12 translated as “have authority over” (*authentēin*). This is the only place in the entire New Testament corpus where this word occurs, and because it is very rare, its interpretation is much disputed. Two things may be observed about the word. First, its rarity underscores the fact that this is not the normal word used for the exercise of authority in the New Testament.²³ Second, the parallels that we do have outside the New Testament suggest that the word has a negative sense: it connotes aggressiveness or domination. What is being forbidden of women, then, is not the normal exercise of authority in teaching, but an aggressiveness that seeks to dominate men. This coheres with the exhortation, not to silence, but to calmness and peaceableness implicit in the Greek word *hēsuchia*, as noted above. And it is in keeping with the call to modesty and decency (*meta aidous kai sōfrosunēs*) found in verse 9. Therefore, verse 12 could be appropriately paraphrased: “I do not permit a woman to boss around a man or tell him what to do.” What Paul has in mind is not the prohibition of formal instruction, but aggressive bids for domination.

A number of scholars have suggested that a pagan cult that involved particular devotion to the goddess Artemis may help to illuminate the context of this instruction.²⁴ While the Genesis account speaks of the priority of the man in creation, the cult placed the female Artemis as the first being (cf. 1 Tim. 2:13f.) Here we see how the eschatological vision of the New Testament, in which “there is no male and female” may have been blended with the pagan cult of Artemis to create a distorted syncretistic vision that was disrupting the life of the community. The same dynamics seem to be reflected in other concerns reflected in the Pastoral Epistles, in-

21. The Greek word is different from the Greek word calling for silence (*sigato*) in 1 Cor. 14.

22. Note the similarity to the context I discussed in 1 Cor. 14 above, where the issue of asking questions aggressively appeared to be at the center of the problem.

23. The more normal Greek word is *exousia* and related forms.

24. Note the reference to Artemis, in connection with Ephesus (“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”) in Acts 19:28-37. See also the helpful summary of related issues by Linda Belleville in Pierce, Groothuis, and Fee, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, pp. 219ff.

cluding a fascination with ascetic practices and the avoidance of marriage (1 Tim. 4:3-5; 5:11-12) and the problematic claim that the resurrection has already occurred (2 Tim. 2:18). Again, we see the same pattern: wherever the vision of a new life in Christ is creating conflict and disruption, and the eschatological tension of the gospel is dissolved, Paul gently reins these views in, with the recognition that the church lives with one foot in the age to come, but with the other foot still firmly planted in this world — and thus subject to its structures and roles. One senses this domestic concern in the way the passage ends, with its focus on safety in childbearing and the call for “them” (probably husband and wife together) to “continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Tim. 11:15).

Therefore, in all three of the above texts, which appear to subjugate women to men in patriarchal terms, we see the predominance of pragmatic rather than fundamental concerns. In each case, the text addresses some kind of culturally inappropriate behavior by women — involving hair styles or coverings, expensive clothing, and aggressive confrontations between men and women. Wherever this aggressive and disruptive behavior occurs, the New Testament writers call for restraint, and they base that call on the creation narratives. The church must not assume that it has passed completely from this world into the age to come. It must not dissolve the “already/not yet” tension and assume that the structures of this world are completely done away with. Yet at the same time, where the life of the age to come can be experienced with peaceableness and harmony, it is to be embraced: women lead, teach, pray, prophesy, host churches, and model a new form of equality that stood markedly apart from the prevailing Greco-Roman culture.

The “Household Codes”

We see this same tension expressed in the so-called “household codes,” passages that offer instruction to the various members of ancient households — husbands and wives, masters and slaves, and parents and children — in a number of places in the New Testament (e.g., Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7). The same pattern of instruction is found frequently in noncanonical early Christian documents as well.²⁵

²⁵ E.g., *Didache* 4:9-11; *Barnabas* 19:5-7; *1 Clement* 21:6-9; Ignatius, *Pol.* 4:1-6:1; Polycarp, *Phil.* 4:2-6:3.

These household codes are structured in terms of the essential pairings of the household, which I noted earlier, based on Aristotle's *Politics*. After discussing procreation and rulership, Aristotle goes on to offer the threefold pairing we see in the household codes:

Now that it is clear what are the components of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management; for every state is composed of households The investigation of everything should begin with the smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these relationships, I mean that of mastership, that of marriage . . . , and thirdly the progenitive relationship.²⁶

Aristotle's discussion makes it clear that the household codes found in the New Testament and other Jewish and early Christian literature are using the basic structures of society as they were understood throughout the ancient world, seen in the microcosm of the household. The household codes are thus clearly part of the structures "of this world," and not part of the new creation envisioned in Galatians 3:27-28. Since most of these household codes come from those portions of the New Testament that emerged at a somewhat later period, some scholars see the emergence of this form of instruction as a lapse back from the eschatological vision of earlier New Testament documents into a more "this-worldly" and less radical vision than we see in Galatians 3:27-28.²⁷

Though this analysis may contain some truth, however, it is not the whole picture. Even in the household codes, which seem so oriented to the structures of the ancient world outlined by Aristotle, we see countervailing motifs that glimpse a new creation, qualifying and deconstructing an absolute understanding of household role differences and responsibilities. Consider, for example, the most extensive of all the New Testament household codes, found in Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Here we see the classic pairs: husbands and wives (5:22-33), parents and children (6:1-4), and masters and slaves (6:5-9). But the entire code is introduced by 5:21: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Hence, a quality of mutuality, flowing directly from the gospel, frames the entire discussion.

26. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1.1253b.

27. See, for example, Johan Christiaan Beker, *Heirs of Paul: Paul's Legacy in the New Testament and in the Church Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

This same tendency toward mutuality is noted in the proportion of instruction given to husbands and wives in this text. Wives receive instruction in three and a half verses (5:22-24, 33b), whereas husbands receive instruction in eight and a half verses (5:25-33a). Moreover, the essence of the instruction given to husbands is to sacrifice their own interests in favor of their wives, and to love them as they love themselves, in imitation of Christ. This proportion of interest in husbands is unprecedented in other household codes outside the New Testament, and it represents a distinctive approach to the life of households: it seeks to introduce into traditional structures something of the new eschatological life ushered in by the gospel. In other words, Aristotle provides the basic framework, but Galatians 3:27-28 provides some of the inner dynamic that begins to transform that framework from within. We see the same pattern in the injunctions given to slaveholders in Galatians 6:9: "And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality." Any rights of masters over slaves are qualified by the recognition that God shows no partiality, and is no respecter of persons, regardless of this-worldly social structures.

It is probably the case that, in the history of Christianity, this internal, deconstructive approach has had the most influence in finally bringing many cultures influenced by Christian faith closer to a fully egalitarian vision for the relationship between men and women. There is something about the call to sacrificial love that finally removes any claim to superiority, any claim to priority in decision-making, any claim to special honor. The same vision finally led, in the nineteenth century, not only to the "humanization" of the slave trade but to the recognition that slavery itself was fundamentally incompatible with the worship of a God who "shows no partiality." Throughout the history of Christianity the eschatological vision of Galatians 3:27-28 has slowly but surely undermined patriarchal structures and relationships, as well as those between masters and slaves, so that more and more, the church has begun to experience in its daily life its destiny as the new creation, where there is "no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Of course, this eschatological vision was not fully realized when the New Testament documents were written. The New Testament writers still had to rein in those egalitarian excesses that disrupted the life of the community and damaged its witness. Such social change takes time — and lots of it. But the capacity of the New Testament writers to embrace this para-

doxical existence, with one foot in "this age" and one foot in the "age to come," set in motion powerful forces of social change that finally have undermined the unquestioned hegemony of patriarchy. To recognize this is not to abandon the more qualified approach to patriarchy in the New Testament documents; rather, it is to embrace the inner dynamic that energizes the New Testament itself.²⁸

Implications for "Gender Complementarity"

Before concluding this chapter, we must explore the implications of this study for an understanding of "gender complementarity" and reflect, at least briefly, on the implications of our analysis for the debate over same-sex relationships. First, I will turn to gender complementarity as a form of moral logic: To what extent should we understand the Bible to presuppose and assume a hierarchical or patriarchal understanding of gender complementarity as one of its underlying forms of moral logic? The implications of our study should now be clear. There are two countervailing streams with respect to patriarchy in Scripture. One of these streams assumes a patriarchal framework and the concomitant obligations, duties, and responsibilities of husbands and wives within household structures. The other stream flows from texts such as the words of Jesus: "In the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35), and the words of Paul in Galatians 3:28: "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." One of these streams assumes life in

28. In some more recent expressions of the Christian debate over patriarchy, the focus has shifted somewhat to more pragmatic concerns focusing on the need, in many communities, to find ways of structuring households that will keep husbands more engaged with family life. In some of these cultures, a rediscovery of male headship has been viewed positively. Yet this pragmatic concern fits very well within the framework we have described, under the basic principle that egalitarian visions that are destructive to community must be subjected to critique. In some contexts, it is simply true that clearer delineations of authority are helpful. However, even in such contexts, these differentiations must avoid the disparity in essential value that represents the darker legacy of patriarchy. Nor should these differentiations be assumed to have universal or transcultural applicability, since that would clearly undermine the eschatological tension regarding gender differentiation that we have been exploring in the New Testament. For further discussion, see David Blankenhorn, Don S. Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds., *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? The Ecumenical Regard Marriage and Its Critics, Religion, Marriage, and Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

this world, shaped by the structures of creation; the other assumes life in the age to come, shaped by the structures of the gospel, lived out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These two streams cannot simply be equated with each other; rather, they live in dynamic tension throughout Scripture. But even the creation narratives themselves provide a glimpse of the new creation ushered in by Christ. They proclaim, in dramatically countercultural fashion, that both men and women are equally image-bearers of God, equally set apart from the rest of creation for covenant communion with God. Similarly, Paul's assertion that both spouses exercise authority over the bodies of the other (1 Cor. 7:3-4) presents a striking contrast to prevailing patriarchal assumptions, and a glimpse into the transforming influence of this eschatological vision on life in this world.

The overall movement of the moral logic of Scripture with respect to patriarchy is thus away from roles defined by household responsibilities in the ancient world — including the divisions of honor, status, and worth defined along gender lines — and toward a vision of mutuality and equality in which the procreative enterprise of male and female no longer defines human identity at its core. Instead, humans draw their core identity from their union with Christ and their participation in the age to come. *

Implications for the Homosexuality Debate

When viewed in a comprehensive canonical context, therefore, hierarchy or patriarchy cannot be construed to be the essence of a normative "gender complementarity" that is allegedly violated by same-sex unions. We might understand gender complementarity in other terms, of course. (In fact, I will explore procreation as a basis for an understanding of gender complementarity in chapter 6.) However, if we are to say that same-sex unions are wrong, we cannot say that they are wrong because they violate a hierarchical understanding of gender complementarity. The Bible, taken as a whole, does not support such a hierarchical vision of gender complementarity as expressive of core Christian identity. Moreover, Paul's insistence in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 that husbands and wives exercise mutual authority over each other's bodies explicitly removes hierarchical relationships from the sex act itself, where, in Paul's vision, a purely egalitarian structure exists. In this context, any attempt to claim that same-sex eroticism is wrong because it violates a hierarchical understanding of gender complementarity cannot be sustained, even if one might wish to posit, as some interpreters

do, a “soft patriarchy,” in which some kind of limited or symbolic hierarchical relationship exists between the genders more broadly in marriage.²⁹

This insight has one further implication that is important to note here. Almost all studies of homoeroticism in the ancient world recognize that the nearly universal pattern of same-sex erotic relationships in the ancient world (particularly among men) involved status differences between the active and passive partners. An individual male did not assume both active and passive roles in same-sex erotic activity in the ancient world. The dominant, penetrating male was always older versus younger, free versus slave, of higher status versus lower status.³⁰ We see this same differentiation in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9, in the two words rendered by the NRSV as “male prostitutes” and “sodomites.” A number of interpreters see these two terms as reflecting this distinction between the active and passive partners.³¹ This connection between higher status and the act of penetration is unquestioned in the ancient world, and it reflects deeply patriarchal assumptions about the relative status of males and females (and by extension, males who play the female role). Because of this, one cannot ignore issues of patriarchy if one wishes to understand the moral logic underlying ancient attitudes toward same-sex erotic relationships.

Similarly, a number of interpreters have suggested that patriarchal assumptions also help to explain the revulsion implicit in the Old Testament texts that address same-sex relationships. For a man, to be penetrated is to be inherently degraded — that is, to be forced to act like a woman instead of a man. It is this degradation that stands behind the assumed offensiveness of the attempted rape of the visitors in the Sodom and Gomorrah story (Gen. 19) and the story of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19. (The offensiveness of this degradation of males is highlighted by the fact that, in both of these ancient stories, the threatened parties offer females as substitutes for the attackers’ demand for males. In the ancient world, deeply shaped by patriarchy, the rape of a woman, as horrible as it might be, cannot be compared to the horror of raping, and thereby degrading, another man.) Similarly, interpreters note the seemingly patriarchal assumptions undergirding

29. See, for example, William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

30. For extensive documentation of this pattern in Mesopotamian cultures, as well as in the Hebrew Bible, classical antiquity, and Judaism, see Martii Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

31. See Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 106ff.

the prohibitions of same-sex eroticism in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The wording itself suggests that *treating a man as if he were a woman* is the core problem. Such an activity would have been viewed, given patriarchal assumptions, as inherently degrading. (Of course, this may not be the only reason why the Levitical texts speak against this activity, but it probably is at least part of the motivation underlying these prohibitions.³²)

It is more debated whether assumptions of patriarchy underlie Paul's rejection of same-sex relations in Romans 1:24-27, and we will need to consider that passage under our review of other forms of moral logic, particularly when we examine "nature" and natural law in chapter 11 below. Some interpreters believe that Romans 1:26 refers to female-female erotic unions when the text says, "Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural." If this were true, patriarchy would be ruled out as the moral logic underlying this text, because, in the logic of patriarchy, for a woman to treat another woman as a man is not to degrade her but to elevate her. Yet I will argue in chapter 11 that this "lesbian" interpretation of Romans 1:26 is unlikely, and that a stronger case can be made for understanding Romans 1:26 as referring to noncoital *heterosexual* intercourse, making this a moot point as far as patriarchy is concerned.

However, my survey of patriarchy in Scripture does suggest that at least some of the biblical prohibitions and negative portrayal of same-sex eroticism were clearly linked to assumptions regarding patriarchy: what made such an act wrong, at least in large part in these texts, was that it was regarded as inherently degrading to treat a (higher-status) man as if he were a (lower-status) woman. To the extent that these concerns shape biblical discussions of homosexual activity, they must be subjected to a wider critique, based on the larger biblical movement we have chronicled, away from patriarchy toward a more egalitarian vision. Looked at in its wider context, Scripture does not see women as inherently of lower status than men, and thus it is not inherently degrading to treat a man as if he were a woman. (It may be impolite or unloving to do so, particularly if such treatment is unwelcome, but those are separate issues that do not involve the *inherent* degradation of a person by reducing his status from male to female.) Nor is it true, in the wider biblical view — despite its seemingly un-

32. In some ancient contexts, such as pederasty in Greek culture, the status difference between the active and passive males entailed a benevolent and pedagogical concern of the older male for the younger, passive male (see the discussion in Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 65ff.) The status differences of patriarchy are not always viewed negatively, but they are rarely questioned in the ancient world.

questioned acceptance in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 — that the rape of a woman by a man is any less offensive than the rape of a man by another man. There may well be other forms of moral logic underlying biblical texts dealing with same-sex eroticism that have more cross-cultural relevance. But to the extent that biblical texts prohibiting same-sex eroticism are based on patriarchal assumptions, the need for a cross-cultural critique of those passages must be recognized.

Summing Up

- We see the presence throughout Scripture of contrasting patriarchal and egalitarian streams.
- These tensions are best resolved by the eschatological vision of the New Testament, which holds in tension the ways in which we “already” have entered into the new life of the world to come (and thus have left patriarchy behind) and the ways in which we still live in this world, and have “not yet” fully entered into the life of the world to come (and thus are still bound, in some ways, by the structures of society, including — in the ancient world — patriarchal structures).
- But the canonical witness as a whole portrays the egalitarian vision as the eschatological destiny of human life, and invites people to live into that destiny, as long as such life does not disrupt the everyday functioning of the Christian community.
- This means that the hierarchy of the genders cannot be used today as a form of gender complementarity, which is allegedly violated by same-sex intimate relationships.
- However, to the extent that hierarchical assumptions shape the Bible’s negative portrayal of same-sex eroticism (and such assumptions are evident in multiple places), these texts may be limited in their ability to speak directly to same-sex relationships today — in a context where such hierarchical assumptions no longer apply.