



*“A cogent reminder of exactly what is  
at stake in the gender debate.”*

—Dorothy Kelley Patterson

WOMEN,  
SLAVES,  
— AND THE —  
GENDER  
DEBATE

A COMPLEMENTARIAN RESPONSE TO  
THE REDEMPTIVE-MOVEMENT HERMENEUTIC

BENJAMIN REAOCH

FOREWORD BY THOMAS R. SCHREINER



“Few things are as shockingly repugnant as reading bold defenses of human slavery written by those who claim the name of Jesus Christ. How could anyone transformed by the gospel advocate human trafficking, captivity, forced labor, and the destruction of families? Some have argued that a Christian vision of gender complementarity will one day seem as horrifying as antebellum slavery views. In this careful scholarly work, Ben Reaoch examines this trajectory hermeneutic as it relates to slavery and to gender. The contemporary generation of Christians should pay close attention to this debate.”

—**Russell D. Moore**, Dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate*, from the pen of Benjamin Reaoch, presents orthodoxy in doctrine and clarity in polarizing positions, together with a cogent reminder of exactly what is at stake in the gender debate. He recognizes that the debate over roles in marriage and family structure tears away at the warp and woof of who God is and what he had in mind for the man and woman created in his image, since the creation order is his tool for revealing himself through the metaphor of the family and familial relationships. Reaoch harmonizes and interfaces appropriately faithful exegesis and consistent hermeneutical methodology so that there is no question of authority or the nature of truth. Whether complementarian or egalitarian, you need to read this book. The complementarian author interacts with egalitarians respectfully by letting them speak for themselves and responsibly by pointing out the underlying issue for all: does God say what he means and mean what he says? For Reaoch, nothing trumps the written Word of God—not modern-day prophets or learned theologians, not new cultural values or human philosophies presented through innovative trajectory hermeneutics. I thank God for raising up men such as Benjamin Reaoch to hold the standard high and refuse to compromise for convenience or culture.”

—**Dorothy Kelley Patterson**, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Ben Reaoch has given us a well-researched, well-written, and well-reasoned resource on the issue of slavery and gender in the New Testament. As our society becomes more and more polarized on issues of sexuality, race, and gender, Christians need significant guidance in navigating what the Bible

says and does not say about these issues and how we are to understand and interpret them. This book provides such guidance and should become a standard in this area of study. It already has a place my library. I highly recommend it to yours.”

—**Tony Carter**, Pastor, East Point Church, East Point, Georgia

“In this very useful study, Benjamin Reaoch adds his voice to the growing chorus of those who have raised concerns with William Webb’s ‘redemptive movement hermeneutic,’ including eminent evangelical scholars such as Wayne Grudem, Thomas Schreiner, and Robert Yarbrough. Reaoch does not merely repeat these critiques, however, but excels in providing an incisive and comprehensive assessment of a hermeneutic that has the appearance of sophistication but in the end is found wanting when examined in light of the biblical teaching and subjected to judicious analysis.”

—**Andreas J. Köstenberger**, Senior Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology and Director of PhD Studies, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Benjamin Reaoch carefully sets forth and analyzes the views of those promoting development in a redemptive-historical hermeneutic. Not only does Reaoch fairly and accurately describe the position, but he also conducts a careful evaluation in which the exegetical and hermeneutical weaknesses of the view are unfolded. I enthusiastically commend this major and convincing treatment of one of the central hermeneutical debates of the day.”

—**Thomas R. Schreiner**, James Harrison Buchanan Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To Stacy

“Her children rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her.”

Proverbs 31:28



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# FOREWORD

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One of the most sobering verses in the Bible is Psalm 50:21, where God accuses Israel, saying, “You thought I was just like you” (HCSB). We are shaped and molded by our culture in more ways than we recognize and even imagine. We have presuppositions, beliefs, and values that later generations will disparage. More important, we have beliefs, practices, and presuppositions that are repugnant to our sovereign, holy, and good God.

Our culture congratulates itself on being more compassionate and caring and gentle than previous generations. After all, our ancestors in the United States practiced slavery. They treated black human beings like property and degraded and dehumanized them. And we rightly see from our social location and place in history that American slavery was a horrendous evil. We see the evil of how we treated Native Americans in the United States, and acknowledge the atrocities committed by some soldiers in wars. We study marriages from a previous era and recognize that too often men have abused their wives and treated them like their property.

We see many of these things clearly and want to avoid the sins of earlier generations. We may secretly congratulate ourselves that we are kinder and gentler than those who preceded us. As Christians we may have grown up with fundamentalist parents who were exceedingly strict and, recognizing their harshness and rigidity, we see ourselves as more like Christ because we are forgiving, tolerant, and compassionate in ways that contrast with them.

In accord with our cultural context and way of perceiving reality, a new hermeneutical approach has arrived. It argues that we need to go beyond the Bible in constructing our ethic. If we stick with what the Bible says, we will perpetuate what is unjust and wrong. According to

this hermeneutic, if we follow what the NT says about the relationships between men and women and husbands and wives, we will not be doing the will of God, for the redemptive movement in Scripture means we must go beyond Scripture to discover God's perfect will.

What makes me skeptical is that the conclusions reached with this hermeneutic fit so well with our cultural moment. According to these interpreters, the Bible doesn't teach that only men are permitted to serve as pastors. Those off-putting verses that Paul wrote don't apply to us today. When we truly understand the message of Scripture, so it is said, we will acknowledge that women may serve as pastors.

Is the redemptive-movement hermeneutic correct? We don't want to be like the fool in Proverbs who gives an answer before listening to what someone else says. We want to listen patiently to new views so that we are not close-minded traditionalists. Yet it is right to be chary of a view that resonates with our culture and goes contrary to what most Christians have believed throughout history. History isn't the final authority. Traditions can be wrong. Everything must be judged by Scripture, yet the burden of proof is surely on those who argue contrary to the view that Christians have espoused throughout history. And I am happy to commend Ben Reaoch's book, for he has patiently listened to those who advocate a redemptive-movement hermeneutic and found it wanting. Significantly, Reaoch makes his case by thoroughly examining and interpreting the Scriptures.

What is worrying is that we tend to think God agrees with our cultural values. We are prone to thinking God is just like us. And if we throw radical postmodernism into the mix, the brew can be quite toxic. I am not saying that the redemptive-movement advocates are postmodern. I am only saying that it fits with the postmodern turn. I just read recently someone who took exception to the command that we should be baptized, for such a hermeneutical conclusion was far too definite and imperious. If God's clear commands are vacuumed into the abyss of postmodern relativity, the Word of God is swallowed up in a philosophy that is contrary to the teachings of Christ (Col. 2:8).

The above comments could be misunderstood. The hermeneutical issues are complex, and those who advocate a redemptive-movement hermeneutic raise matters that must be carefully considered. Ben Reaoch's insightful evaluation of the hermeneutical and exegetical questions is precisely the kind of work we need. The issues raised can't be examined

thoroughly in a brief essay or a foreword! The question is whether the redemptive-movement hermeneutic is itself hermeneutically persuasive and exegetically faithful. Reaoch demonstrates that it falls short on both levels. The author's work is marked by careful exegesis, hermeneutical awareness, and charity toward those with whom he disagrees. I am grateful for this book, for Reaoch believes that God's final and definitive Word is found in the NT, and that the ethic of the NT does not need to be improved upon, for it is the living and abiding Word of God.

Thomas R. Schreiner



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Working on this project has been a joy, and finally bringing it to completion is an occasion for much thanksgiving. God has been very good to me, and I am grateful to him for so many individuals who have blessed my life. My parents, Ron and Barb Reaoch, have been a great encouragement and inspiration to me since I was young. They instilled in me a love for the Bible and a passion for Bible teaching, ministry, and missions. In God's good providence, I have been fortunate to develop many friendships that have spurred me on in my love for the Lord and for his Word. Noah Toly, John Kimbell, Jason Meyer, Dustin Shramek, and Doug Wolter are among these. Additionally, God has graciously given me the opportunity to sit under many godly mentors and teachers. Mark Talbot at Wheaton College inspired me to think deeply and clearly about theological matters. John Piper, Tom Steller, and Sam Crabtree at Bethlehem Baptist Church continued to feed this passion and imparted to me a love for the church.

This book began as my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Tom Schreiner at Southern Seminary. Tom has been for me an exemplary teacher, pastor, and friend. I have learned much from his classes, sermons, and books, from his insightful feedback during the process of this project, and from his wise counsel in various matters of life and ministry. Bruce Ware, Bill Cook, and Andreas Köstenberger also read this material, and I thank them for their valuable feedback. It has certainly improved the final product.

I also want to express my gratefulness to all those at P&R Publishing who have been involved in bringing this work to publication. Marvin Padgett, John Hughes, and Brian Kinney have all been a great help and encouragement to me in this process.

It's a great privilege to be serving as pastor of Three Rivers Grace Church in Pittsburgh. I serve alongside elders and deacons who have made many sacrifices to help me complete this book, and the entire congregation has encouraged me and prayed for me throughout the process. I count it a tremendous blessing to be part of this congregation.

Finally, I want to express my profound gratitude for the precious family that God has given me. Our children, Milaina, Noah, and Annalyse, are a joy to my heart. My wife, Stacy, has been an amazing support and encouragement to me through all the ups and downs of school, ministry, and family life. She is a passionate follower of Jesus, an excellent wife, a loving mother, an organized and efficient homemaker, an example and mentor to other women, a joy to share life with, and my dearest friend. In many ways, Stacy is responsible for this writing project, for she was the one who suggested that I write a dissertation related to biblical manhood and womanhood. This has been a topic that is near and dear to Stacy's heart, and we have had the joy of seeing its fruit in our own marriage, in our family, and in ministry. I am very fortunate to be married to a woman who joyfully embraces the biblical vision of womanhood. It is therefore with much joy that I dedicate this work to her.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

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AB	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)
BDF	Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CSR	<i>Christian Scholar's Review</i>
DLNTD	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i>
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>

<i>JBMW</i>	<i>Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament— Supplemental Series
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
NAC	New American Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TLNT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

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# INTRODUCTION

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The current debate over the role of women in the home and in the church shows no signs of diminishing.<sup>1</sup> Egalitarians continue to present arguments against role distinctions, while complementarians still argue that the Bible presents men and women as equal in essence and distinct in role. An egalitarian argument that is gaining support is known as the redemptive-movement hermeneutic, or trajectory hermeneutic.<sup>2</sup> Advocates of this approach concede many of the exegetical conclusions made by complementarians concerning the relevant biblical passages, but then they argue there are indications in the Bible that move us *beyond* the specific instructions of the Bible and toward an ultimate ethic. For instance, the Bible commands slaves to submit to their masters, and yet basic principles in the Bible point toward the abolition of slavery. The issue of women's roles is very much the same, these writers assert.<sup>3</sup> The Bible

1. In 2004, two significant books on this topic were published. From the egalitarian position came Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004). From the complementarian position came Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004). More recently, Grudem has published another book on this subject, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

2. Most notably, William Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001). Also R. T. France, *Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test Case for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); David L. Thompson, "Women, Men, Slaves, and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries," *CSR* 25 (1996): 326–49; I. Howard Marshall, "Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage: Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, ed. Pierce and Groothuis, 186–204; idem., *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). Prior to these evangelical feminist writings, a similar line of argumentation is found in Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

3. For example, Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), devotes an entire chapter to this, "The Parallel Exhortations to Slaves and Women to Be Subordinate," 251–58. Also, one of David Thompson's three major theses is as follows: "The church's experience in discerning the will of God

places women in a subordinate role in the home and in the church, yet there are also principles in the Bible that point toward their full liberation.<sup>4</sup>

## THESIS

On the one hand, the redemptive-movement description of the slavery issue may prove to be helpful. We must not be too quick to forget how adamantly our evangelical forefathers argued from the Bible for the continuation of slavery,<sup>5</sup> and complementarians may benefit from insights the redemptive-movement hermeneutic offers in arguing against slavery from the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

However, there are some key differences between the slavery issue and the gender issue in the Bible, and the redemptive-movement hermeneutic overemphasizes the similarities between the two. The analogy between slaves and women is a foundational assumption for this hermeneutic,

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regarding slavery provides a hermeneutical paradigm sufficiently parallel to instruct its processing of the biblical material on the relationship between men and women" (Thompson, "Women, Men, Slaves, and the Bible," 327).

4. The verse most commonly cited is Gal. 3:28. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 190, comments, "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*" (italics original). Similarly, Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 148, says, "Had the church, through the centuries, interpreted 'neither slave nor free' in Galatians 3:28 in terms of the explicit implementation in the New Testament, the institution of slavery would never have been abolished. The same is true of women's liberation." Also see Richard Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), who deals with the cultural (Jew/Gentile), social (slave/free), and sexual (male/female) aspects of Gal. 3:28.

5. See Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 31–64. A notable defender of slavery was Charles Hodge. See his essay, "The Bible Argument on Slavery," in *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright on This Important Subject*, ed. E. N. Elliot (1860; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 841–77. Also see Allen C. Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Antislavery Moment," in *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work*, ed. John W. Stewart and James H. Moorhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 299–325.

6. Wayne Grudem does not think a redemptive-movement hermeneutic is needed in order to oppose slavery from the Bible. The abolitionists, he asserts, "*did not advocate modifying or nullifying any biblical teaching*, or moving 'beyond' the New Testament to a better ethic. They taught the abolition of slavery from the Bible itself" (italics original) (Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 614). He cites Theodore Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 4th ed. (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), and Mason Lowance, ed., *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000). I agree with Grudem that we do not need to move "beyond" the New Testament to a better ethic." However, I am open to learning from trajectory egalitarians as they have wrestled with the complex biblical and historical data on slavery.

and therefore we must closely scrutinize it. It may be appropriate to see a “trajectory,” in some sense, in the biblical statements on slavery, whereas the instructions to women do not allow this. My thesis is as follows: The significant differences between the New Testament instructions to slaves and to women seriously undermine the conclusions made by the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. The fact that the New Testament “points beyond” the institution of slavery does not indicate that it likewise points beyond God’s design for gender roles.

The crucial distinction between the two issues is seen in the fact that no biblical writer advocates for slavery based on the order of creation. In this way the slavery passages are significantly different from the instructions concerning the roles of men and women, which are explicitly rooted in creation. The issue of slavery in the Bible is not an easy one, however. The New Testament does not explicitly condemn slavery or clearly command masters to release their slaves. Is the absence of a clear denunciation of slavery because the New Testament contains a less-than-ultimate ethic, as trajectory advocates would suggest? Or is there a more accurate way to understand the New Testament statements in light of their cultural context?

This book will thoroughly investigate the exegetical and hermeneutical questions related to the issues of slavery and women in the New Testament. I will seek to demonstrate that a trajectory approach is not a viable solution to these complex questions and is not justified in its conclusions with regard to the gender debate.

### THE REDEMPTIVE-MOVEMENT HERMENEUTIC

This book will be a combination of exegetical study and hermeneutical analysis, with an emphasis on the latter. Chapter 1 will begin with a description of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic, including a brief discussion of complementarian responses to this hermeneutic, and finally a section on the nineteenth-century slavery debate.

### EXEGESIS

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine the passages that pertain to slaves (chapter 2) and women (chapter 3). The detailed exegesis of these passages is a crucial component of this study. Kevin Giles asserts, “The reasons given for slaves to be subordinate are more consistent and weightier than those

to women, for there is a repeated Christological appeal (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; 1 Peter 2:18–21).<sup>7</sup> These kinds of statements must be evaluated carefully. I will attempt to conduct a detailed exegetical analysis of each passage in the hope of clarifying the distinctions between the two kinds of texts.

Chapter 2 will begin with a section on slavery in the first century. Then the exegetical discussion will be organized by focusing on the passages where specific commands are given to slaves, first examining the passages that contain a ground for obedience (Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:24; 1 Peter 2:19–20) and then the passages that attach a purpose clause to the imperative (1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:10). Other relevant passages will then be covered (Philemon; Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:1; 1 Tim. 1:10; 1 Cor. 7:21). The chapter will conclude by addressing the question, “Why does the New Testament not condemn the institution of slavery?”

In chapter 3, a similar format will be used in the examination of the New Testament commands to women, first discussing those commands that contain a ground clause (1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:13; Eph. 5:23; Col. 3:18; 1 Cor. 14:34), and then the two passages in which exhortations to women are followed by a purpose clause (1 Peter 3:1; Titus 2:5). Chapter 4 will be a comparison of the data gathered in chapters 2 and 3. I will observe that similarities are evident between the slavery passages and women passages when we look at the purpose clauses, but a comparison of the ground clauses reveals significant differences. Chapter 4 also contains a discussion of the Household Codes.

## HERMENEUTICS

The other significant component of this study will be hermeneutical. The exegesis is crucial to demonstrate clearly the similarities and differences between the texts, but the hermeneutical questions are the determining factor in this debate.<sup>8</sup> Much of the hermeneutical discussion will involve responses to William Webb, since his book and articles contain the fullest expression of a redemptive-movement hermeneutic.<sup>9</sup> Other

7. Giles, *Trinity and Subordinationism*, 257.

8. Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, points to the difference between his own commentary on the Pastorals and William D. Mounce’s commentary on the Pastorals, even though the two scholars share “much the same exegetical environment.” He then states, “Something more than exegesis is at work” (36).

9. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*; idem, “A Redemptive-Movement Model” in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zonder-

trajectory advocates will enter the discussion at various points, but the structure of chapters 6 and 7 will be organized around eight of Webb's hermeneutical criteria that he presents in *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of theological analogy, preliminary movement, seed ideas, and purpose/intent statements. On these points, there are certain similarities between the slavery issue and the issue of women's roles.<sup>10</sup> However, there are also important differences. Chapter 6 will deal with the issues of original creation, primogeniture, creation versus redemption, and specific instructions versus general principles.

The redemptive-movement hermeneutic seeks to wrestle with some difficult interpretive questions, and helpful observations are made. However, the conclusion these authors reach, that we must move beyond the specific biblical instructions concerning manhood and womanhood, is not warranted. I will seek to demonstrate that it is unwarranted through the detailed exegesis of the slavery passages and women's passages, and then by interacting with the hermeneutical points that have been presented.

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van, 2009), 215–48; idem, “Balancing Paul’s Original-Creation and Pro-Creation Arguments: 1 Corinthians 11:11–12 in Light of Modern Embryology,” *WTJ* 66 (2004): 275–89; idem, “Bashing Babies against the Rocks: A Redemptive-Movement Approach to the Imprecatory Psalms” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, November 20, 2003); idem, “The Limits of a Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: A Focused Response to T. R. Schreiner,” *EQ* 75 (2003): 327–42; idem, “A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: Encouraging Dialogue Among Four Evangelical Views,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 331–49; idem, “A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: Responding to Grudem’s Concerns” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, November 17, 2004).

10. I will use the phrase “the issue of women’s roles” to refer to the group of issues that come under one umbrella in biblical teaching, namely, husband-wife role relationships and the question of women teaching or having authority over men in the context of the church.



# 1



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## THE REDEMPITIVE- MOVEMENT HERMENEUTIC

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This chapter will summarize the views of several scholars who have advocated a trajectory hermeneutic and have drawn a close parallel between the slavery issue and the gender debate. This summary will contain a comprehensive history of neither the slavery debate nor the gender debate, but rather will focus on the redemptive-movement hermeneutic and the relationship between slavery and the issue of women's roles in the New Testament. The chapter will conclude with a section on the nineteenth-century slavery debate, because some aspects of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic find antecedents in abolitionist arguments.

KRISTER STENDAHL

In his 1966 book, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, Krister Stendahl presents a hermeneutical model very similar to the trajectory approach advocated by evangelicals today.<sup>1</sup> He writes in the context of the debate over women's ordination in the Church of Sweden, and he acknowledges that the real issue in the debate is the *application* of Scripture. Both sides agree concerning the original meaning of the texts,

1. Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966). Originally published in Swedish in 1958.

but they disagree as to how the texts should be applied today.<sup>2</sup> Stendahl advocates moving beyond the practices of the first-century church and following the trajectory set out for us in statements such as Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11–12. He refers to the “breakthrough” of Galatians 3:28, and he sees in 1 Corinthians 11:11–12 a “glimpse” of that breakthrough.<sup>3</sup> He stresses the need to apply Galatians 3:28 in all its dimensions and all its fullness. Each pair (Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female) must be worked out in the life of the church and not restricted to “the realm *coram deo*.”<sup>4</sup>

Stendahl also emphasizes the newness of this “breakthrough,” stating that “something has happened which transcends the Law itself and thereby even the order of creation.”<sup>5</sup> These radical principles obliterate the traditional distinctions in each of the three pairs, and point beyond them to a higher ideal. Therefore, we must no longer enforce the specific instructions concerning women’s subordination. Those instructions *describe* the situation of the early church, but they are not *normative* for the church today.<sup>6</sup>

Concerning slavery, Stendahl gives slight preference to the following translation of 1 Corinthians 7:21: “but even if a chance of liberty should come, choose rather to make good use of your servitude.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, Paul was probably not encouraging emancipation, but rather calling individuals to remain in their current positions. Stendahl briefly discusses Philemon and writes, “The tone of the letter is best understood as a plea for having

2. *Ibid.*, 8.

3. *Ibid.*, 32, 35.

4. *Ibid.*, 34.

5. *Ibid.* Earlier, he stated, “It should be noted that [Gal. 3:28] is directed against what we call the order of creation, and consequently it creates a tension with those biblical passages—Pauline and non-Pauline—by which this order of creation maintains its place in the fundamental view of the New Testament concerning the subordination of women” (32).

6. *Ibid.*, 35–36: “[The ‘realistic interpretation’] does not see that the correct description of first-century Christianity is not automatically the authoritative and intended standard for the church through the ages. . . . [B]y making their description normative, they neutralize the power of the new and contribute to a permanent ‘holding minus *x* minutes’ in the drama of the launching of the kingdom.”

7. *Ibid.*, 33. Stendahl makes reference to the two renderings of the verse given in the New English Bible. The one he favors is found in a footnote of that Bible. For a full discussion of the difficulties here, see S. Scott Bartchy, *MALLON CHRESAI: First Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1973). He does not think this verse makes a judgment one way or the other on slavery. He translates the verse this way: “Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t worry about it. But if, indeed, you become manumitted, by all means [as a freedman] live according to [God’s calling]” (183). For a defense of the view that Paul is encouraging emancipation, see Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 315–18. So also David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 307–14.

Onesimus set free.”<sup>8</sup> But then he asserts, “Whatever the implications of such texts, there can be no doubt that the New Testament shows no urgency in the matter of emancipation of slaves.”<sup>9</sup> He points to the history of the debate over slavery as an indication that we must move beyond biblical proof texts and apply Galatians 3:28 more broadly to political and social matters.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, these “trajectory” arguments from Stendahl have been around for almost half a century. Stendahl maintains that the real issue in the debate over women’s ordination is how the texts should be applied. His assertion is that the “breakthrough” texts such as Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11–12 should point us beyond the specific instructions we find elsewhere in the New Testament. These passages point to something new, something beyond the order of creation. Stendahl also uses the uncertainty of the New Testament’s stance on slavery as an indication that we cannot limit Galatians 3:28 to the level of individual salvation, apart from political and social issues. This “breakthrough” must trump other New Testament statements.

#### R. T. FRANCE

R. T. France comments on the similarity between the slavery debate and the debate over the ordination of women. Concerning the slow process that brought about the abolition of slavery, he writes,

It was only gradually that Christians were led to realize that Scripture speaks with more than one voice on the issue, and that the simple appeal to the cultural pattern which appears on the surface of the biblical text may need to yield to more fundamental ethical principles which, while not explicitly applied to slavery in Scripture, must ultimately lead to its abolition.<sup>11</sup>

He also observes the male-dominated nature of first-century society and comments, “it remains, like the institution of slavery, a part of the given scene which is neither commended nor directly disputed, but which will

8. Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, 33.

9. *Ibid.*, 34.

10. *Ibid.*

11. R. T. France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry: A Test Case for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 16–17.

in due course be undermined as Christian people are enabled to apply the wider principles of New Testament ethics in the context of a changing world-order.”<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the book, France cites F. F. Bruce’s comment that Galatians 3:28 is the basic principle by which the other Pauline statements must be interpreted.<sup>13</sup> France agrees with this principle, which rests not on a small number of texts, “but in a *trajectory* of thought and practice developing through Scripture, and arguably *pointing beyond itself* to the fuller outworking of God’s ultimate purpose in Christ in ways which the first-century situation did not yet allow” (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

#### RICHARD LONGENECKER

In his book *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, Richard Longenecker sets forth a “developmental hermeneutic.” He upholds the proclamation and principles of the New Testament as normative, and then clarifies, “The way that proclamation and its principles were put into practice in the first century, however, should be understood as signposts at the beginning of a journey which point out the path to be followed if we are to reapply that same gospel in our day.”<sup>15</sup>

In the rest of the book, Longenecker seeks to embark on that journey, and he organizes his discussion around the key passage, Galatians 3:28. First he deals with the social ramifications of Jew and Greek, then slave and free, and finally male and female. In his chapter on the male/female compo-

12. *Ibid.*, 36.

13. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 190. Luke Timothy Johnson, commenting on 1 Tim. 2:12, expresses the same sentiment: “I find the statements [in 1 Tim. 2] to be in sharp tension with other Pauline declarations of a more egalitarian character, above all Gal. 3:28. . . . I agree that our growth in understanding of the human person, partly guided by the Holy Spirit, and partly driven by the resistance of brave women to these strictures, makes it impossible to regard the statements disqualifying women from public speech and roles of leadership as either true or normative.” Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 208–9. On the other hand, Judith Gundry-Volf, in an essay dealing with Gal. 3:28, writes, “In Paul we are witnessing a model of thought in which equality does not presuppose all-out sameness (dissolution of femininity or/and masculinity) but sameness *in some respects*—with respect to sin and with respect to the way of salvation” (italics original). Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal. 3, 28,” in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift*, ed. C. Landmesser et al., BZNW 86 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 476.

14. France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*, 94–95.

15. Richard Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 27. *Idem*, *Galatians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 156–59.

ment of this verse, he points out two key categories that the apostle Paul was dealing with: creation and redemption. The focus on creation emphasizes “order, subordination, and submission,” while the focus on redemption stresses “freedom, mutuality, and equality.”<sup>16</sup> “What Paul attempted to do in working out his theology was to keep both categories united—though, I would insist, with an emphasis on redemption.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, there are still differences between men and women (e.g., Paul condemns homosexual behavior). But the emphasis is on redemption, so that “what God has done in Christ transcends what is true simply because of creation.”<sup>18</sup>

This emphasis on redemption over against creation is closely related to the principle of following the perceived path of the *general* principles in Scripture (which are the redemptive, forward-looking, liberating statements) rather than some of the *specific* instructions (which seem restrictive, emphasize order, and may be rooted in creation). Like France, Longenecker cites Bruce’s comment on Galatians 3:28. This seems to be a basic presupposition for these scholars, namely, that their understanding of Galatians 3:28 takes ultimate priority in the discussion. This implies a tension between the general principle in Galatians 3:28 and the specific instructions in other passages.

#### DAVID THOMPSON

In his 1996 article, “Women, Men, Slaves and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries,” David Thompson develops a system that is similar to what Webb would present five years later.<sup>19</sup> “One attends especially to two matters in discerning the direction of the canon’s dialogue: 1) the relationship of the particular passages to their cultural environment, i.e., the direction in which the passages themselves in their historical contexts are already pointing, and 2) the relationships between the passages involved.”<sup>20</sup>

16. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, 84. A similar sentiment is shared by J. A. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 121: “So, the state and society remain, but the theological realities of the New Age are already undermining their *inequitable, discriminatory, and hierarchical* foundations. To change the metaphor, within the old society is a new one, built on quite different foundations of *love, equality, and unity*” (emphasis added).

17. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, 92.

18. *Ibid.*

19. David L. Thompson, “Women, Men, Slaves, and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries,” *CSR* 25 (1996): 326–49.

20. *Ibid.*, 332.

Here we see a foreshadowing of the cultural analysis conducted by Webb. Thompson also capitalizes on the comparison between slavery and the gender debate. The abolitionists, he writes,

saw a trajectory leading beyond the canon and its unresolved dialogue to the abolition of slavery. . . . This is important history, for few if any present evangelicals would want to defend slavery as acceptable Christian teaching. This means we have already accepted the hermeneutic entailed in the egalitarian position regarding men and women.<sup>21</sup>

Thompson observes a close parallel between the issue of slavery and the issue of women's roles in the home and church. He also advocates a trajectory hermeneutic that analyzes the relationship between biblical commands and the cultural setting in which they were written.

#### WILLIAM WEBB

*Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* has been a significant addition to the trajectory hermeneutic;<sup>22</sup> William Webb also refers to it as a redemptive-movement hermeneutic. It becomes much more complex and detailed in the way he formulates it. He presents eighteen criteria by which we can determine whether a command is limited to the original culture and setting, or whether it transcends culture and is applicable to all times and places. As the title indicates, he analyzes the three issues involving slaves, women, and homosexuals, and the method is to compare what the Bible says about these issues with the cultural contexts in which the biblical statements were written (either ancient Near Eastern or Greco-Roman). When the biblical commands can be seen against the backdrop of their cultures, a trajectory can be discerned that is either more liberating or more restrictive than the original context. Webb sees the commands concerning homosexuals moving in a more restrictive direction, whereas

21. *Ibid.*, 344.

22. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001); *idem*, "The Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 382–400; *idem*, "Gender Equality and Homosexuality," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 401–13; *idem*, "A Redemptive-Movement Model," in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 215–48.

he sees the commands for slaves and women moving in the direction of complete liberation. Thus, on the one hand, he concludes that the biblical prohibitions against homosexual behavior are still authoritative. On the other hand, we are encouraged to move beyond the specific instructions that condone slavery and male headship.

Webb repeatedly likens the issue of women's roles—the combination of biblical issues such as a wife's role in marriage and women teaching and having authority over men in the context of the church—to the slavery issue, and this correlation is foundational to his hermeneutic. Under the criterion of “seed ideas,” Webb discusses the social implications of Galatians 3:28 (also 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:11). He states,

One must now ask if the “in Christ” formula should carry social implications for the equality of women. It certainly did in Paul's day for Gentiles. And, it did over the course of church history for slaves. Why should it not today for females? In this manner Paul's sociological outworking of the Galatians 3:28 text becomes a paradigm of equality for these other categories of social inequality.<sup>23</sup>

The parallel that is drawn between the slavery texts and the women's texts has a great deal of persuasive power. Virtually all agree that slavery is wrong and that abolition is an appropriate application of the Bible's teaching. But the question Webb raises in the above quote is crucial: Why shouldn't the social implications of Galatians 3:28 be applied in such a way that male headship is abolished just as slavery has been abolished in this country?

Webb is keenly aware of the apparent difference between the two issues. “Obviously there exists a crucial difference between slavery and patriarchy. The former is not found in the creation story, while the latter, perhaps in implicit ways, is.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore a significant piece of Webb's argument has to do with original creation. Criterion 6 and criterion 7 are devoted to this issue, and they fall under the designation “Moderately Persuasive Criteria.” Webb states, “A component of a text may be trans-cultural if its basis is rooted in the original-creation material.”<sup>25</sup> He then discusses various components of Genesis 1–2, seeking to demonstrate

23. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, 87.

24. *Ibid.*, 248.

25. *Ibid.*, 123.

that certain aspects are transcultural (e.g., lifelong marriage as opposed to divorce) while others are not (e.g., farming as an occupation, ground transportation, vegetarian diet). Concerning the roles of men and women, he admits that there are “hints of patriarchy” in the creation narrative. But since there are several cultural components in the garden, these “quiet whispers” of patriarchy cannot be conclusive.<sup>26</sup>

In criterion 7, he moves to a discussion of primogeniture, the rights of the firstborn. The importance of this discussion is found in the debate over the correct interpretation and application of 1 Timothy 2:12, where the following verse (v. 13) grounds the instruction in the order of creation. “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Webb is sympathetic to the complementarian interpretation of this verse, which acknowledges the aspect of primogeniture. However, he then marshals an argument against the continued application of this principle. Several biblical examples are given in order to show that primogeniture is often overturned. Primogeniture is also an ancient practice, and it is no longer enforced by Christians. Therefore, since primogeniture is a cultural component of the text and no longer applicable today, Webb concludes that we should only apply the underlying principle of “granting honor to whom honor is due.”<sup>27</sup> In relation to 1 Timothy 2 specifically, he says we should apply this principle to both genders: “Choose teachers/leaders who are worthy of high honor within the congregation.”<sup>28</sup>

Pivotal to Webb’s conclusions are the following assumptions: (1) the issue of gender roles is closely analogous to the slavery issue, and (2) patriarchy’s basis in original creation does not conclusively differentiate the two. If, in fact, basis in original creation is more than “moderately” persuasive, and thus sets apart the women’s texts from the slavery texts, Webb’s egalitarian position based on a trajectory hermeneutic would be severely weakened.

#### KEVIN GILES

Kevin Giles is more explicit than Webb in drawing a parallel between slavery and the gender debate.<sup>29</sup> He strongly emphasizes the biblical support

26. *Ibid.*, 130–31.

27. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, 145.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Giles’s overall emphasis is slightly different from Webb’s. Whereas Webb stresses the redemptive movement in the Bible, Giles stresses the difference between our culture and the ancient cultures

for slavery, and rehearses the arguments that have been used to defend it. His point is to show that slavery is a cultural aspect of the Bible just as male headship is. In fact, he says, “The ‘biblical’ case for slavery is far more impressive than the ‘biblical’ case for the permanent subordination of women.”<sup>30</sup> The tendency is to read the slavery texts in a negative light, which is then presented as a conclusive argument for moving beyond the Bible’s instructions.

Giles also attacks the assumption that the slavery issue and the gender issue are supported differently in the Bible. He writes, “The assertion by contemporary hierarchical-complementarians that these parallel exhortations to women and slaves to be subordinate are to be contrasted is an entirely novel idea, never heard before the 1970s and rejected universally by critical scholarly studies of the Household Codes or Rules.”<sup>31</sup> He proceeds

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represented in the Bible. Giles comments on Webb’s claim concerning the redemptive movement anticipated in the Bible, “There is much in Webb’s book with which I would agree, but to prove his point he would have to show that the moderating comments on slavery and women in Scripture were unique to the Bible. . . . In any case, I cannot see how this argument really helps on its own. The primary question is, why did Christians not see this redemptive motif in Scripture on slavery for eighteen centuries and on women for twenty centuries? Was it not a change in culture that allowed Christians to see in Scripture what had hitherto been hidden to them? The redemptive motif did not bring the change, it was the change that brought to light the redemptive motif.” Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 244n29. Giles has also written “The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 334–52.

30. Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 230. Craig S. Keener also discusses the relevance of the slavery issue in his book, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992). Concerning Ephesians 5–6 he writes, “Those who wish to save this passage’s power structure in the home regarding wives and children but not regarding slaves will have a difficult time. It is true that the Bible enjoins children’s obedience more clearly than it does that of slaves; but it also enjoins the submission of slaves more clearly than it does that of wives” (italics original) (Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 188). Keener also writes, “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” (Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 207–8). In a similar way, J. Albert Harrill, in his Epilogue, criticizes the Southern Baptist Convention for the inconsistency between its “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation” and the article on the family in *The Baptist Faith and Message*, which says, “A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband.” Harrill writes, “This amendment on women, which explicitly affirms the inerrant and timeless truth of the household duty codes, contradicts the resolution on slavery, which implicitly denies their moral relevance today. The contradiction exposes the specious argument present in the amendment” (J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006], 195).

31. Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 253.

by comparing the exhortations to wives and the exhortations to slaves and concludes that “the appeal to creation is *the exception to the rule*, not the pattern” (emphasis original).<sup>32</sup>

This gets to the heart of the question I will be dealing with in this book. What, in fact, are the similarities and differences between the slavery texts and the women texts? Giles emphasizes the similarities and minimizes the differences, and thus builds a case for viewing the biblical instructions as remnants of an ancient culture. They no longer apply in our day. If a careful study of the two issues demonstrates significant differences, Giles’s conclusions will lose much of their force.

### I. HOWARD MARSHALL

I. Howard Marshall can also be placed in the category of those who advocate a trajectory hermeneutic. He argues that the New Testament commands concerning women are no longer applicable. Paul was speaking to his cultural context, and those details have little or no relevance for us now. In his book, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, Marshall sets forth a program similar to although not as comprehensive as Webb’s.

Marshall refers favorably to Webb’s work: “[Webb] is able to show how there is a tendency toward a fuller liberation in the ongoing history of redemption, . . . and he argues that this can and should be carried further in the church.”<sup>33</sup> In Marshall’s chapter in *Discovering Biblical Equality* he sounds very much like Webb when he says, “The concept of marriage between equal partners is just beginning to be perceived in the New Testament, and Paul should not be expected to step outside his time and see the consequences of his teaching any more than he is to be faulted for not commanding the abolition of slavery.”<sup>34</sup>

32. Ibid., 256. Giles bases his comparison on the tables found in David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 88.

33. I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 38. Marshall also refers to the hermeneutical principles set forth in C. H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). And, interestingly, he states, “The idea of a ‘redemptive trajectory’ is not original with Webb” (Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 38n7), and references R. T. France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*.

34. I. Howard Marshall, “Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage: Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 195.

## COMPLEMENTARIAN RESPONSES

Wayne Grudem and Thomas Schreiner have both critiqued Webb's system in a detailed manner. On the issue of slavery, Grudem criticizes Webb for assuming that the Bible condones slavery: "The NT never commanded slavery, but gave principles that regulated it and ultimately led to its abolition."<sup>35</sup> The important question is whether or not the statements in the New Testament can be taken as an endorsement of slavery. If so, either slavery is in fact justified, or the redemptive-movement model seems to be a necessary and plausible tool in showing why it is not justified. But if the New Testament simply regulates slavery and points toward its abolition, then the perceived need for the redemptive-movement hermeneutic evaporates.<sup>36</sup>

Thomas Schreiner's main criticism of Webb is that he does not deal sufficiently with redemptive *history*. There is a tremendous emphasis on redemptive *movement*, but it lacks an explanation of redemptive *history*.<sup>37</sup> This results in confused comparisons between certain Old Testament statements and New Testament instructions. For instance, since many of the practices in the garden of Eden are seen as cultural (vegetarianism, walking as the only mode of transportation, farming as the only occupation), Webb relegates his sixth and seventh criteria (basis in original creation, and primogeniture) to the level of only "moderately persuasive." Since we do not continue to enforce many aspects from the garden, neither should we continue to enforce the instruction from 1 Timothy 2:12, which is based on truths from the garden.

When we let Scripture interpret Scripture, though, we can see fairly easily what aspects of the garden have an enduring significance. As Schreiner notes, it is clear even in the book of Genesis that God did not intend for all humans to limit themselves to walking or farming or a vegetarian diet.<sup>38</sup> When we come to 1 Timothy 2 we should see the weight of Paul's argument from creation. Not everything in the creation

35. Wayne Grudem, "Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic? An Analysis of William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*," *JETS* 47 (2004): 313.

36. Grudem concludes, "Once we remove his claim that the Bible condones slavery, Webb's Exhibit A is gone, and he has lost his primary means of supporting the claim that we need his 'redemptive-movement hermeneutic' to move beyond the ethic of the Bible itself," *ibid.*, 314.

37. Thomas R. Schreiner, "Review of *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*," *JBMW* 7 (2002): 46.

38. *Ibid.*, 48.

account is to be applied today, of course, but the inspired apostle uses this pivotal aspect of the creation order in his instruction for the ministries of women. Schreiner writes, “When it comes to divorce, homosexuality, and the women’s issue, the NT argues from the created order.”<sup>39</sup> Slavery, in contrast, is not supported in this way in the New Testament. “Nowhere does Paul justify slavery by referring to a particular OT text or the created order, as he does the relationship between men and women.”<sup>40</sup>

Robert Yarbrough also critiques the redemptive-movement hermeneutic, responding to Webb as well as Stendahl, Bruce, and Giles.<sup>41</sup> First, Yarbrough responds to Webb’s critique of his chapter in the first edition of *Women in the Church*.<sup>42</sup> Webb speaks unfavorably of Yarbrough’s “static hermeneutic,” and contends that it should not be labeled “historic” or “traditional,” for the redemptive-movement hermeneutic has also played a major role in the history of interpreting the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Yarbrough agrees that the redemptive-movement hermeneutic has been used throughout the centuries in various ways. “But,” he says, “I continue to maintain that my hermeneutic, which affirms some form and degree of male headship in home and church, is the ‘historic’ one compared to [Webb’s].”<sup>44</sup> He goes on to say, “How can we call Webb’s approach ‘historic’ when it demands that we change the general understanding of biblical teaching on men and women that prevailed for nearly twenty centuries?”<sup>45</sup>

Later in the chapter, Yarbrough interacts with Krister Stendahl and F. F. Bruce, who both used Galatians 3:28 to effectively silence other gender passages. Yarbrough concludes:

The problem with Bruce’s and Stendahl’s method is not that it recognizes tension in the Bible. The Reformation principle that Scripture interprets Scripture (*sacra scriptura sui interpres*) implies the presence of obscure or ostensibly conflicting passages. The problem lies in the recourse to

39. *Ibid.*, 49.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Robert W. Yarbrough, “Progressive and Historic: The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 121–48.

42. Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 155–96.

43. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, 35 (including both footnotes); 256n3.

44. Yarbrough, “Progressive and Historic,” 122.

45. *Ibid.*, 123.

a distinctly modern consciousness to adjudicate Scripture's meaning. This is to step outside the horizon of Scripture to determine Scripture's significance. It is to imperil the *sola scriptura* doctrine of the Reformation and similar affirmations of earlier periods.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, Yarbrough critiques the view of Kevin Giles. He states that "Giles too facilely equates biblical teaching on slavery and its teaching on male-female relations,"<sup>47</sup> and goes on to delineate some of the key differences.

The complementarian position observes a fundamental distinction between the slavery issue and the issue of women's roles. The Bible does not, in fact, condone slavery. Rather, it regulates it and points to its demise. Regarding women, on the other hand, we find instructions that are rooted in the creation order and therefore transcend culture.

#### NINETEENTH-CENTURY SLAVERY DEBATE

Can the redemptive-movement hermeneutic be traced back to the abolitionist arguments of the nineteenth century? This interesting question has been raised by those involved in the current discussion.<sup>48</sup> A multitude of arguments were formulated against slavery in the 1800s, and some of them were similar to the trajectory approach. I will paint a general picture of the nineteenth-century slavery debate, in which I will describe some of the abolitionist arguments. In this way I hope to show that some abolitionist arguments were similar to the trajectory hermeneutic, but others

46. *Ibid.*, 139.

47. *Ibid.*, 141.

48. In various places, Webb points to ways in which the abolitionist arguments are similar to his, and how the pro-slavery arguments are similar to a "static hermeneutic." For instance, in his discussion of specific instructions and general principles, he writes, "Slave owners in the United States valued the concession-based *specifics* of Scripture and argued their case primarily from those verses. . . . Abolitionists, on the contrary, began with the *broad principles* of Scripture and showed that slavery should be repealed on the basis of love and the ethics of equality in God's kingdom and in Jesus' new community" (*Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, 180). Also see pages 33–34, 91, 104, 186. The quote above from David Thompson is another example of this. More recently, Carl Sanders has written a paper titled, "The 19th Century Slave Debate: An Example of Proto-Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutics?" He seeks to show that there are many parallels between the abolitionist arguments of the nineteenth century and Webb's hermeneutical criteria. Sanders provides examples of the following criteria found in Webb's book: preliminary movement, seed ideas, breakouts, specific instructions versus general principles, competing options, penal code, closely related issues, contextual comparisons, appeal to the Old Testament, and opposition to original culture (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, November 18, 2004).

were not. Thus, an appeal to redemptive movement was not necessary to formulate a valid biblical argument against slavery.

### *The Biblical Debate over Slavery*

Mark Noll delineates four positions that were held in the antebellum slavery debate. The first group abandoned the Bible because they viewed it as sanctioning slavery.<sup>49</sup> The second group agreed that the Bible sanctioned slavery, and thus used the Bible to justify slavery in the United States. A third group “conceded that, while the Bible did indeed sanction a form of slavery, careful attention to the text of Scripture itself would show that the simple presence of slavery in the Bible was not a necessary justification for slavery as it existed in the United States.”<sup>50</sup> Finally, there was the position that distinguished between the letter and the spirit of the Bible. The letter may condone slavery, but the spirit of the biblical message was clearly against it.<sup>51</sup> This final position resembles facets of the trajectory hermeneutic, for it rests on the distinction between specific instructions and general principles.

Looking at the antislavery arguments, J. Albert Harrill provides an assessment of how these arguments evolved over the course of the debate. The earlier abolitionists, he says, used a more literal and “anti-intellectual” approach to Scripture. For instance, some argued that Jesus never condemned slavery because he never met any slaves, asserting that the Greek word *doulos* simply means “servant.”<sup>52</sup> Others even appealed to the translators of the King James Version of the Bible, who always rendered *doulos* as “servant” rather than “slave.”<sup>53</sup>

49. Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43.

50. *Ibid.*, 44.

51. *Ibid.* Interestingly, Noll later notes, “This move led directly or indirectly to the theological liberalism of the last third of the twentieth century” (Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” 51). Harrill also makes this observation: “The antislavery and abolitionist interpretations of the New Testament during the American slave controversy also pushed biblical exegeses toward a critical hermeneutics, preparing the way in the United States for the eventual reception of German higher criticism” (Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 166).

52. So Albert Barnes, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Perkins and Purves, 1846), 242–49.

53. Harrill quotes from a debate in which it was said, “If they were slaves, the translators of our Bible would have called them so” (emphasis in original; Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 167, quoted from J. Blanchard and N. L. Rice, *A Debate on Slavery Held in the City of Cincinnati, on the First, Second, Third, and Sixth Days of October, 1845, upon the Question: Is Slave-Holding in Itself Sinful, and the Relation between Master and Slave, a Sinful Relation?* [Cincinnati: Wm. H. Moore, 1846], 336).

Still others, however, presented a more reasonable rationale for why Jesus did not directly denounce slavery, namely, that he did not speak out against *every* evil he encountered. We do not find any record of him condemning practices such as “sodomy, polygamy, infanticide, idolatry, or blasphemy,”<sup>54</sup> but we cannot conclude that Jesus did not think these were sins.

Nevertheless, when the pro-slavery arguments seemed to be winning the exegetical battle, other abolitionists made a dramatic shift toward “immutable principles.” “The exact opposite of the earlier plain-sense approach, the hermeneutics of immutable principles claims that biblical interpretation must look beyond the flat reading of the text.”<sup>55</sup> This took various forms, including appeal to the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12 and Luke 6:31) and to Colossians 4:1, “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly.” “Because Col. 4:1 cohered with the Golden Rule, it must be the privileged text that exercises hermeneutical control over the interpretation of other, more difficult Pauline passages.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the general principles of love and equality achieved priority over the specific instructions that seemed to condone slavery.

Still, there was the question of why the New Testament does not speak out openly against slavery. Harrill says that among the earlier antislavery arguments, *expediency* was offered as the reason for this.<sup>57</sup>

54. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 167. George Cheever wrote, “It is averred that Christ’s own silence on the subject of this sin gives consent to it. Christ was silent in regard to the sin of sodomy, in regard to infanticide, in regard to idolatry; and by this method of reasoning, not only is the law of God against these crimes abolished, and the crimes themselves made innocent by such silence, but he that speaks against them, when Christ did not, is himself guilty of a presumptuous sin, and may think himself happy if he is not struck with some divine judgment” (George Cheever, *The Guilt of Slavery and the Crime of Slaveholding: Demonstrated from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures* [Boston: John P. Jewett, 1860], 332–33).

55. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 169–70.

56. *Ibid.*, 172–73.

57. *Ibid.*, 173. He says that William Ellery Channing was the main proponent of this view. Channing was professor of theology at Harvard Divinity School and was a Unitarian. This argument is similar to that used by trajectory advocates today who appeal to evangelism as the apostle’s reason for teaching wifely submission. Webb cites Titus 2:5, “that the word of God may not be reviled,” and 1 Peter 3:1, “so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,” demonstrating the purpose for wifely submission. He goes on to say that a wife’s submissive spirit may no longer serve those same purposes in our culture (*Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, 107–8). Peter H. Davids also takes this approach in his chapter, “A Silent Witness in Marriage: 1 Peter 3:1–7,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*. He writes, “Ironically, interpretations that focus on the unilateral obedience or submission of wives to husbands, regardless of cultural context, achieve the opposite of Peter’s intention. Rather than promoting harmony with culture, they set Christian marriage partners

It was thought that if Paul *openly* condemned slavery, it would be so countercultural that it would cause more harm than good. Indeed, an outright attack on the institution of slavery in the first century could have incited the anger of the Roman Empire and brought an end to the burgeoning Christian church.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it was thought that the seed of abolition grew *secretly*.

Later abolitionists, though, rejected this reasoning in favor of the idea that the seed grew *openly*.<sup>59</sup> Paul was not, in fact, secretive about his position on slavery. He made it clear in 1 Timothy 1:10 (κῆρ) that “manstealing” is wrong and in 1 Corinthians 7:21 that slaves should seek freedom if the opportunity presents itself.<sup>60</sup> However, when these arguments did not seem to be effective, the abolitionist cause turned to another hermeneutical approach, namely, moral intuition. This position emphasized the ascendancy of personal conscience as a way of discerning God’s law.<sup>61</sup> In this way, the abolitionist arguments took a further step away from a “plain sense” reading of the Bible.

### *Specific Instructions versus General Principles*

With this background in view, let us focus on one similarity between nineteenth-century abolitionist arguments and the current trajectory model. Mason Lowance compares pro-slavery and antislavery sermons, and writes of the latter, “Their emphasis was less on the exegesis of text and more on the moral application of the spiritual principles inherent in the text to the social and political issue of slavery in America.”<sup>62</sup> Lowance points out this tendency in a sermon by Alexander McLeod, who began with Exodus 21:16 as his biblical text, “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.” But

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at odds with culture and thus heighten the tension, and Christianity is perceived as undermining culture in a retrogressive way. That is precisely what 1 Peter is seeking to minimize” (Davids, “A Silent Witness,” 236).

58. William E. Channing, *Slavery*, 2nd ed. (Boston: James Munroe, 1836), 122.

59. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 173.

60. The meaning of 1 Cor. 7:21 is debated, as discussed above.

61. Harrill points to the Second Great Awakening and the moral philosophy of Common Sense Realism as two forces that brought rise to this hermeneutic of moral intuition. William Lloyd Garrison took this position to its extreme, for he thought the Bible should not even play a role in moral debates (Harrill, *Slavery in the New Testament*, 175–76).

62. Mason Lowance, ed., *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 49.

then McLeod's sermon turns quickly to general principles, and he appeals to the "natural rights of man."<sup>63</sup>

Willard Swartley makes a similar observation of abolitionist hermeneutics and commends this practice to his readers.

Abolitionist writers gave priority to theological principles and basic moral imperatives, which in turn put slavery under moral judgment. The point we should learn from this is that theological principles and basic moral imperatives should be primary biblical resources for addressing social issues today. These should carry greater weight than specific statements on a given topic even though the statements speak expressly to the topic under discussion.<sup>64</sup>

This emphasis on principles seems to be one of the most apparent parallels between nineteenth-century abolitionism and the contemporary trajectory hermeneutic.

### ***Emancipation of Slaves and Women***

The next question is how the abolitionists viewed the relationship between the emancipation of slaves and the emancipation of women, for this connection forms a critical piece of the foundation for the trajectory hermeneutic. On this question we find an interesting difference between nineteenth-century abolitionists and the redemptive-movement hermeneutic today. As noted above, the contemporary trajectory approach appeals strongly to the parallel between the slavery texts and the women's texts. But in the nineteenth century, it was the pro-slavery position that assumed a parallel between the two issues, and abolitionists differentiated them.<sup>65</sup>

Albert Barnes, an abolitionist, writes, "But it is not true that in any sense the apostles 'legislated' for slavery as they did for the relation of

63. *Ibid.*, 73, writing of McLeod's sermon, "The Practice of Holding Men in Perpetual Slavery Condemned."

64. Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 61.

65. See Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women*, 49, 52. This was not true of all abolitionists. Theodore Weld was an abolitionist as well as an egalitarian and saw some parallels between the two issues. See Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 32–33. Also Robert H. Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Weld and the Dilemma of Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 175–78.

husband and wife, and parent and child. It is not true that they ever represented those relations as parallel, or as equally desirable and acceptable to God.<sup>66</sup> Then he demonstrates how they are different,

(a) they uniformly represent servitude as a *hard* condition, and as in itself undesirable. . . . But where do they represent the condition of a wife or child as necessarily a *hard* and *undesirable* condition? (b) They enjoin on slaves submission *to* their condition as a hard one, and one in which they were constantly liable to suffer wrong. . . . (c) The principal virtue which the apostles enjoin on slaves to cultivate, is that of *patience under wrong*. . . . (d) They represented it as desirable to escape from servitude if it could be done; or as more desirable to be free than to be in that condition [cites 1 Cor. 7:21]. But where is any thing like this said respecting the condition of a wife or child? (italics original)<sup>67</sup>

These observations demonstrate the difference between the way the Bible treats slavery and the way it treats marriage and family matters. The Bible points toward the demise of slavery but does not call for an end to role distinctions in marriage or the end of role distinctions in the parent/child relationship.

The pro-slavery position denies this distinction. George Armstrong writes, “With civil government, marriage, the family, and slavery [the Apostles] dealt in the same way. All that was sinful, contrary to the laws of God, in each, as then actually existing, they clearly and unequivocally condemn. . . . But they touch not the institutions themselves.”<sup>68</sup> Pro-slavery arguments viewed the slavery issue as analogous to the gender issue, whereas abolitionist arguments did not. Presumably, since male headship was so ingrained in the social structures of the nineteenth century, the pro-slavery advocates tried to use patriarchy in their defense. The abolitionists had to distinguish slavery from the instructions for women so they could show that the slavery passages needed to be applied differently.

In a review of Swartley’s book, Stephen Mott observes the connection between these issues. “That the pro-slavery debaters saw that the hermeneutics condemning slavery could support the emancipation of women

66. Barnes, *Inquiry*, 276.

67. *Ibid.*, 276–77.

68. George D. Armstrong, *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (1857; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 57.

is also striking. Opponents of slavery rejected the connection. History, as well as hermeneutical insight, fortunately appear to be with the fears of the former.<sup>69</sup> This statement assumes the pro-slavery arguments were correct in viewing the two debates as parallel. However, the arguments for the pro-slavery position are not necessarily valid. Abolitionists presented some sound arguments for viewing the two issues differently.

### ***Biblical Arguments against Slavery***

Certainly many arguments against slavery were based on immutable principles, and other arguments were weak and misguided. But we must not minimize the value of other solid, biblical arguments that arose out of the texts themselves. For instance, the appeals to Exodus 21:16, 1 Corinthians 7:21, 1 Timothy 1:10, and Philemon<sup>70</sup> are powerful arguments that come from what the Bible itself teaches. One need not pit immutable principles against specific instructions. Rather, these verses speak for themselves. The observation that Jesus did not condemn *every* wrong he encountered is also helpful in refuting the claim that Jesus implicitly *endorsed* slavery.

In these ways, abolitionist arguments were presented that make legitimate appeal to biblical texts. Even in the Old Testament, and especially in Paul, a foundation was laid that would reform slavery and eventually lead to its demise. The fact that the pro-slavery position offered alternative readings of these passages does not diminish these verses as significant statements that undermine the entire slave enterprise. I will further discuss the exegetical issues of the debated passages later in the book. At this point I simply want to assert that some of the abolitionist arguments were sound and biblical, without appealing to immutable principles.

### ***Racism and Slavery***

The question then arises, Why did the arguments from Scripture not succeed? Why did abolitionism have to move to immutable principles and

69. Stephen Charles Mott, review of *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation*, by Willard M. Swartley, *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 7 (1985): 120.

70. Barnes writes, "The principles laid down in this epistle to Philemon, therefore, would lead to the universal abolition of slavery. If all those who are now slaves were to become Christians, and their masters were to treat them 'not as slaves, but as brethren beloved,' the period would not be far distant when slavery would cease" (*Inquiry*, 330, quoted in Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women*, 46).

then even to a hermeneutic of moral intuition? Mark Noll writes, “The main reason, however, that alternative hermeneutics failed, as well as the main reason for the conceptual confusion on Scripture in the division between North and South, was race.”<sup>71</sup> The reason the Southern exegetes could not see the hypocrisy of their “exegetical” conclusions was that they were blind to the blatant racism they simply presupposed. Although the slavery advocates may have shown a higher level of exegetical sophistication, their moral blindness kept them from seeing the perversity of their endeavor. Noll notes the disconnect: “On slavery, exegetes stood for a commonsense reading of the Bible. On race, exegetes forsook the Bible and relied on common sense.”<sup>72</sup>

Charles Hodge is a prime example of an excellent exegete and theologian who could not see that his racial presuppositions radically affected how he applied Scripture. He believed that the Christian life must be guided by the Bible alone.

But so pervasive was the instinct of racism, even in his guileless soul, that he could not see how thoroughly he intertwined conclusions about what the Bible taught and opinions about the nature of African Americans that arose from no text of Scripture. The Bible was a lot clearer on slavery than on the enslavement of one race only, but Hodge could not tell the difference.<sup>73</sup>

The debate would have been much different if it were not for this moral blindness. The abolitionist arguments likely would have been received with less hostility and suspicion. There would have been more open-mindedness

71. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” 61.

72. *Ibid.*, 63.

73. *Ibid.*, 64. It should be noted, however, that Hodge advocated gradual emancipation of slaves. “In a series of learned works, he conceded the biblical grounding for slavery as an institution, but argued that a proper understanding of Scripture, as well as a right judgment on American circumstances, should move toward the amelioration of slavery and then its effacement. Unfortunately for Hodge’s later reputation, his attack on the biblical exegesis of abolitionists has been remembered more clearly than his defense of gradual emancipation” (Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” 59–60). See Charles Hodge’s essay, “Slavery,” *Princeton Review* 7 (1835), reprinted in Hodge’s *Essays and Reviews* (New York: R. Carter, 1857), 573–611; *idem*, “The Bible Argument on Slavery,” in *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright on This Important Subject*, ed. E. N. Elliot (1860; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 841–77. Also cf. Allen C. Guelzo, “Charles Hodge’s Antislavery Moment,” in *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work*, ed. John W. Stewart and James H. Moorhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 299–325.

toward the biblical arguments against slavery, rather than the dogmatic assumptions that arose from racism.

## CONCLUSION

The two foci of this study (slavery and women's roles) have been related to one another in fascinating ways throughout the years. The nineteenth-century debate reminds us that we all have presuppositions, and we ought to be mindful of the effect those presuppositions can have on our exegetical conclusions. A reflective and self-critical spirit is needed in dealing with these sensitive issues.

In the nineteenth century, some already observed a tension between specific instructions and general principles, and they asserted that the general principles must take precedence. In modern scholarship, Stendahl applied this method to the debate over women's ordination. Others have adopted this position and have developed it in a much fuller way (mainly Webb). My desire is to take a fresh look at the exegetical and hermeneutical questions related to slavery and women's roles and to bring some clarity to the assumed tension between general principles and specific instructions.

**T**HE DEBATE over the role of women in the church is not diminishing. **Complementarians** argue that men and women are equal but have distinctive roles, while **egalitarians** argue against role distinctions.

The egalitarians' redemptive-movement hermeneutic has gained support. Advocates concede many of the exegetical conclusions made by complementarians about relevant Bible passages, but then argue that elsewhere the Bible moves us *beyond* these specific instructions—e.g., the Bible commands slaves to submit to their masters, and yet basic principles in the Bible point toward the abolition of slavery.

Is the issue of women's roles the same?

This is a timely examination of the exegetical and hermeneutical questions, demonstrating the inconsistencies of adopting the egalitarians' hermeneutical approach—and the dangerous consequences.

“Whether complementarian or egalitarian, you need to read this book. The complementarian author interacts with egalitarians respectfully by letting them speak for themselves and responsibly by pointing out the underlying issue for all, i.e., whether God says what he means and means what he says.”

—*Dorothy Kelley Patterson*, Professor of Theology in Women's Studies, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Well researched, well written, and well reasoned . . . significant guidance in navigating what the Bible says and does not say on these issues and how we are to understand and interpret them. This book should become a standard in this area of study. It already has a place in my library. I highly recommend it to yours.”

—*Anthony J. Carter*, Pastor, East Point Church, East Point, Georgia

“Some have argued that a Christian vision of gender complementarity will one day seem as horrifying as antebellum slavery views. In this careful scholarly work, Ben Reaoch examines this trajectory hermeneutic as it relates to both slavery and gender. The contemporary generation of Christians should pay close attention to this debate.”

—*Russell D. Moore*, Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

**BENJAMIN REAOCH** (Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is pastor of Three Rivers Grace Church (SBC) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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