

## Various extracts from “Hermeneutics and Gender,” by John Mark Hicks

Full article (*highly recommended*) available at [www.mgmorrow.com/JMH.PDF](http://www.mgmorrow.com/JMH.PDF)

- **Egalitarianism:**
  - *Denies* male headship as a theological value and opens *all* functions in the church/assembly to women.
  - Full equality of role relationships and functions within the leadership and ministry of the church.
  - Two types
    - Evangelical Egalitarianism (those who believe in biblical authority)
    - Non-evangelical Egalitarianism (those who ~reject biblical authority)
  
- **Complementarianism:**
  - *Affirms* the principle of male headship
  - Distinguishes between “male headship” and “male leadership”
    - All leadership is not headship even though all headship is leadership. One may lead in many ways that does not assume headship, but one who is head is by definition a leader.
    - Creation values and redemptive history teach the principle of male headship. Males are responsible/accountable for the direction of the assembly of God (whether Israel or church) and their homes.
    - Nevertheless, women served significant ministry functions in both Israel and the church, including having a “voice” in the worship assemblies of Israel and the church. This servant-leadership (ministry) did not undermine male headship. In fact, women served in these roles under the headship of males as they adopted cultural standards for symbolizing that headship in appropriate ways (e.g., wearing a head covering in Corinth).
  - Maintains that many traditional practices are oppressive and deny women the freedom that God permits and encourages.
  - This group is open to more significant and visible participation by women in church life and the assembly, though they wish to maintain the principle of male headship in the church and family.
  
- **Traditionalism:**
  - *Affirms* the principle of male headship
  - Interprets “male headship” to mean that women are excluded from any voice in the assembly (e.g., women cannot make announcements, verbally request prayers, ask questions, voice a prayer) or leadership function in the church (e.g., women cannot chair committees on which men sit, teach in any setting where men are present, cannot vote in “men’s business meetings,” etc.).
  - The difference between Complementarians and Traditionalists is best tracked on a continuum. But the major visible distinction between Complementarian and Traditionalism is the *audible participation by women* in the assembly (Traditionalists generally see no audible role, but Complementarians see some audible role even while Complementarians may disagree about the specifics).

## 1a -- Non-Evangelical Egalitarianism: Biblical Authority Rejected.

"What leads us to perceive biblical texts as oppressive or as providing resources in the struggle for liberation from patriarchal oppression or as models for the transformation of the patriarchal church into women-church is not a revealed principle or a special canon of texts that can claim divine authority. Rather it is the experience of women struggling for liberation and wholeness...A feminist critical interpretation of the Bible cannot take as its point of departure the normative authority of the biblical archetype, but must begin with women's experience in their struggle for liberation...[the feminist hermeneutic] places the biblical texts under the authority of feminist experience...the Bible no longer functions as authoritative source but as a *resource* for women's struggle for liberation."

Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, pp. xvi, 13-14

## 1b -- Evangelical Feminism: Seeking Biblical Authority.

- Evangelical feminism (or egalitarianism) does not give feminist experience a normative value. Rather, the Bible is normative. *Evangelical egalitarians are egalitarian because they believe the Bible teaches egalitarianism.*
- Theologically, the standard argument runs something like this:
  - God created humanity as male and female. They are co-equals who are both charged with caring for the earth and filling it. God did not intend male headship.
  - The Fall introduced the principle of male headship which subordinated women to male egos.
  - Redemption means a restoration of creation values as intended by God. Equality must be restored.
  - Key text for evangelical feminism is Galatians 3:28—there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.

## **Mutual Understanding**

- a. We need mutual understanding of one another as we might differ about the understanding and application of some of these texts. It is hard to envision exactly how NT assemblies looked and exactly what happened in those assemblies in any kind of detail. The “home” atmosphere of these assemblies would certainly make them different from our formal auditorium assemblies.
- b. Those who understand the biblical text to authorize and encourage women to participate in the corporate prayer life of the church as leaders need to understand why others think differently based upon these texts. Further, to exclude women from something that the Bible permits violates the freedom of Christian women in the gospel. It is a freedom women may give up for the sake of the gospel or unity, but it should not be forced on them.
- c. Those who understand the biblical text to exclude women from participation in the corporate prayer life of the church as leaders need to understand why others think differently based upon these texts. Further, to violate the Biblical principle of headship in a way that the Bible excludes undermines our faithfulness to Scripture where God bears witness of himself. We seek to be a biblical people who are guided by God’s Holy Scripture.

### **From the NIV Application Commentary:**

A passage such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 reveals the need for all believers to have a relatively sophisticated grasp of principles of biblical hermeneutics, so that they can sift through historical-cultural background, understand the meaning of key terms and grammatical interrelationships within a passage, and fit this passage in with Paul's other teaching on the topic. Even then, interpreters who show great exegetical common sense elsewhere often say downright silly or irresponsible things when issues as emotional or volatile as this one come into play.

We all need regular reminders of the role presuppositions play in our interpretation, and we must moderate our opinions with healthy doses of humility. We must study all of the Scriptures relevant to a topic like men's and women's roles and affirm a position that we believe does adequate justice to all of the biblical data. In short, we must agree to disagree at times.

Biblical [evangelical] feminists and moderate traditionalists are generally closer to each other in practice than the rhetoric of their theoretical disagreements might suggest. We must leave room for one another's models in case we ourselves are wrong. But we also must draw the line to exclude more strident or more dangerous forms of hierarchicalism [traditionalism] and egalitarianism. When most of a certain hierarchicalist's arguments sound indistinguishable from the arguments used to support slavery in pre-abolition days, we must beware.<sup>38</sup> When most of a certain egalitarian's arguments closely resemble those used to support homosexual behavior, we must shrink back.<sup>39</sup> But in between there is a wide berth in which we can continue to study the relevant texts together in love, trusting that none of us has yet received ultimate illumination.

38. See the helpful exposé in Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1983), 198–202.

39. As with the Evangelical Woman's Caucus, which very fact in part led to the withdrawal of the more conservative participants and the founding of the Christians for Biblical Equality.