

## ABSTRACT OF CONCEPTS RELEVANT TO WOMEN'S STUDIES

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### Introduction

Something must explain why equally committed Christians come out on different sides of the same issue from the same Bible. It is either because of (1) unconscious presuppositions, (2) faulty reasoning, (3) misunderstanding of how language works, or (4) inadequate concept inventory.

The following notations attempt to (a) map out the issues, (b) isolate the relevant interpretation principles, (c) define the exegetical task, and (d) identify the biblical texts most involved. They also try to (e) narrow down the point at issue so that irrelevant matters are set aside so that what we are sure of can lessen the practical problem in the church.

### I. Fundamental Concepts

#### A. The interpersonal context (the body concept *vs.* individualism)

The Christian ideal is not individualism but body, gestalt rather than atomism, holism *vs.* reductionism. The New Testament worldview prioritizes “body” over individuals, which gives life a higher complexity factor. That makes unity, not equality, the *summum bonum*—the highest good—not equality but oneness-plus-responsibility, not ideal sameness but complementary operation. Unisex and homosexuality is the logical end of individualism-plus-sameness. Total interchangeability is not what the body model predicts. Factors that remove equality as total interchangeability include the following: (a) relative gifting that corresponds to variant roles within the common larger purpose (see below), (b) home responsibilities, and (c) practical necessity.

#### B. The foundations of worth: the role-worth distinction

#### C. The formal-natural leadership distinction, influence-authority-force as three ways of getting others to do our will

It is not so much what men and women do, but the framework, circumstance, and way they do Christian work. In matters of church leadership, women fulfill responsibility through influence in mixed settings while men may also fulfill responsibility with authority added. That format applies especially to the final places of responsibility in church operations.

#### D. The meaning of headship and deference

#### E. The concept of relative gifting

male-female differences as statistical differences by degree

male-female differences as continuous *vs.* categorical in psychological and skill

matters  
 vulnerability variable  
 existential-eschatological variable; women are more relationship oriented while men are more goal directed. Women more easily get fulfillment out of smoothing relationships while men more naturally get fulfillment out of achieving purposes that lie before them.  
 women as usually more narrowly referenced  
 women as more affectively oriented and men more rationally oriented.  
 relative gifting and distinctive roles within the common larger purpose

- F. The central-to-less-central format of biblical issues  
 Equally true does not equal equally important.
- G. Things women actually did in biblical times

## II. Interpretation Issues

- A. adequate view of scripture
- B. generality vs. uniformity; speaking of the “typical situation”: Paul may be speaking about church operations in light of home operations. He may be envisioning the typical situation in the home and therefore does not want to set up church operations in a way that interfere with home involvements.
  - marital variable: most men and women are married.
  - children variable: most married people have children.
- C. implied cultural limitation, a species of implied limiting framework
- D. parity of reason/consistency on issues of like nature
  - veil-wearing and other matters of dress code, slavery, customs (see “Ministry Before Consensus”)
  - conclusions about the church must fit with conclusions about the home (see above under “B”) Note the attempts to evade Paul’s meaning.
- E. *a priori* (primary) vs. *post facto* (confirmatory) reasons
- F. level to which reasons are reasons: female deference or the specific issue (veil-wearing, teaching)
- G. cp. “*eating at home*”  
 women being “*silent in the churches*”
- H. issues over word meanings
- I. the theological-practical distinction and the relationship between them
- J. the genre issue: law vs. wisdom = commandment vs. inspired advice = law vs. expediency (“*I do not permit a woman . . .*”)

Female leadership may not be wise if

- (a) children get neglected
- (b) women get burned out trying to be career persons,, mothers, and homemakers at the same time

K. example vs. precedent

Paul is dealing with pastoral matters in 1 Corinthians **11** and 1 Timothy **2**.

L. presuppositions

theological  
hermeneutical

experiential “blind spots”; we find it difficult to gain objective perspectives even in research settings. The interpretation of the data can be skewed by the interpreter’s own sexuality. That may be one reason it is important to listen to scripture as wisdom because the mind of the creator we assume lies behind the directives given.

that one person/personality has that another does not have  
 that one sex has about the other—that men have about women and *vice versa*  
 that women/men have about themselves in contrast to the opposite sex  
 that each man/woman has about the opposite sex on the basis of limited  
 close experience with wife, mother, sisters; husband, father, brothers, *etc.*,  
 causes faulty generalization.

cultural bias

setting the conclusion and then working toward it

letting pragmatics become too ultimate; what “works” is what is good.

M. Hermeneutics is not after the objective truth, but after the intended meaning (hermeneutics and apologetics). The point of the observation relative to women’s studies is that we need to let New Testament writers say what they are trying to say instead of creating unlikely, foreign, fanciful means and imaginary circumstances that allow them to end up meaning what we think they should be saying. “Objective truth” may be only what we think if true.

III. Narrowing the Problem: the things we can be sure of

- A. personal maturity
- B. leadership theory
- C. false issues