

Redeeming Women in the Grand Narrative of Scripture

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In light of the biblical grand narrative of redemption and restorative justice, patriarchy and androcentrism can no longer be seen as normative, but as regrettable conditions that God and God's human agents are working to overcome.

Many feminists believe that the Bible cannot speak authoritatively to feminists and feminist concerns due to the pervasive presence of androcentric features within it. Yahweh is the God of the *fathers*, the patriarchs, making God and the divine blessings appear patriarchal and androcentric. Men often have center stage, with women in the periphery. Some texts appear to be patently misogynistic, treating women as inferior to men. It seems impossible not to conclude that the Bible is written by men, about men, and for men.

I believe that a grand narrative approach can help us to understand the Bible as authoritative and redemptive for both women and men. This approach can also give us a redemptive hermeneutical lens with which to interpret the so-called "problem texts" in Scripture. The biblical grand narrative concerned with redemption and restorative justice places injustice against women in a light that breaks the back of patriarchy. In that light, patriarchy and androcentrism are no longer seen as normative, but as regrettable conditions that God and God's human agents are working to overcome.¹

As is typical of great stories, the story of the Bible has a plot marked by a beginning (Genesis 1-11), a middle (the rest of the Old Testament), and an end or perhaps the beginning of the end (the New Testament). Each stage in the plot is marked by *three parallel themes*: creation or inau-

gured new creation (or partial redemption), rebellion and its consequences, and the promise or hope of complete new creation (full redemption). In turn, each theme includes *three elements* – the image of God, procreation or fruitfulness, and dominion – that particularly concern the identity and destiny of women in God’s purposes. This way of understanding the grand narrative provides an effective hermeneutical and theological lens through which to interpret the Bible’s so-called “difficult passages” concerning women.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GRAND NARRATIVE

Creation. In the beginning, God’s “very good” creation (Genesis 1:31) is gloriously reflected in God’s making of humans, female and male, in the divine image (1:26-27). Being made in God’s image implies the created unity and equality of male and female. Likewise, Genesis 2 affirms the essential harmony and parity of the woman with the man. The initially “not good” state of the man’s life (2:18a) is remedied by the formation of woman, who completes humanity. The man praises the woman as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23), recognizing the fact that she is essentially like him. They are “one flesh” and “not ashamed” (2:24-25).

God gives mandates to both woman and man as one: to multiply and fill the earth and to rule over the earth (1:28). The divine blessing of procreative fruitfulness (1:28) finds fulfillment in the institution of marriage (2:24). It is notable that Genesis 2:24 suggests that the man leaves his own family to be with his wife and presumably with her family. Such an arrangement contrasts with the more common patrilocal practices in the Ancient Near East in which the husband and his father own or otherwise control the woman and her children.

The mandate to have dominion finds an immediate application in Yahweh’s commands to “till” and “keep” (2:15) the garden, which anticipates the intrusion and temptation by the serpent in chapter 3. Although the command is initially given to the man, the formation of the woman as *‘ezer kenegdo* – i.e., the helper equal to him (2:18) – presumes that the woman will share the responsibility to have dominion. The Hebrew term for “helper or help” is predominantly used of God the “helper,” or deliverer (sixteen times out of twenty-one occurrences). Thus, the term points away from the subordination of woman and asserts her equality. In sum, Genesis 1 and 2 present human life as it was meant to be, a life that is as good for woman as for man.

Rebellion and Its Consequences. Tragically, the idyllic life in paradise does not last. In Genesis 3, there is a sudden shift from a blissful to painful state of being. The first humans disobey God’s authority and command. As a consequence, God exiles them, separating them from the life-sustaining presence of God. Humanity “falls” into a sorry state of alienation, shame, aversion, and male-domination.

Human dominion over the cursed and hostile creatures and the unyielding ground is now frustrated (3:17-19). Unfulfilled dominion appears to find its distorted outlet in human-to-human domination, for God predicts the typical post-fall patriarchal social order: “and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16b). The fracture and distortion in the paradigmatic horizontal relationship of husband and wife soon escalate into Cain’s fratricide and Lamech’s murder in Genesis 4. Society in general breaks down in a thoroughgoing descent into violence and corruption that culminates in the sin-saturated world of Noah’s time (see 6:11–12).

Alienated from the Giver of life, there is also frustrated procreation, indicated by the statement that the woman will bring forth children in distress² and groaning³ (Genesis 3:16). These expressions do not refer to “labor pains” in isolation, but to anything that hinders fruitfulness—including barrenness, miscarriages, birth defects, and infant or maternal mortality. In the context of the judgment oracle, the frustrated procreation likely results from the serpent’s hostility against woman and her offspring. Evil has now corrupted every aspect of the once “very good” creation. As such, Genesis 3 represents a complete antithetical parallelism to Genesis 1–2, powerfully evoking the sense of tragedy over humanity’s loss of paradise and exile into a cursed earth.

Hope for restoration. While Genesis 3–11 represents an antithesis to Genesis 1–2, Genesis 3 also contains hope for a redemptive “overcoming” of the effects of sin. Most importantly, the woman’s child will “strike” the head of the serpent (3:15c), which is often interpreted as “messianic” by Jews and Christians. In the context of the two-testament Christian canon, this is the *proto-euangelion* (“proto-gospel”) that points to a cosmic struggle between good and evil and to Christ’s ultimate triumph over Satan. Within the Old Testament, the “seed of the woman” may also refer to a promised child, such as Isaac, or collectively to Israel, who will disable the “serpent” and its evil workings. In any case, Genesis 3:15c implies that evil and its effects, including male domination, will ultimately cease. The conditions proclaimed in the judgment oracle in Genesis 3:14–19 are *not* inalterable divine mandates or prescriptions. Rather, they are descriptions of a corrupted state of affairs that should and will be overcome.

THE MIDDLE OF THE GRAND NARRATIVE

Even after the judgment of the flood, the depressing parade of evil marches on, as evidenced by the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. God must “recreate” humanity and start again with his own elect people. Yahweh clearly expresses his intention to redeem all creation and restore its original comprehensive goodness in his call of and promises to Abram and Sarah and his partial fulfillment of those promises in and through Israel (see Genesis 12:2-3). But God’s redemption and restoration come only through conflict with the serpent’s diabolical hostility against

God and against the woman and her seed. This is exemplified first in Sarah's barrenness, then in the Egyptian enslavement and oppression, and then in the formidable military foes of Israel. There is a partial restoration of an "edenic" life in the Promised Land, but it is curtailed by the Israelites' persistent rebellion against God and eventual exile from the land of promise, their new Eden. Yet this middle part of the grand narrative, which tells of the ancestors and the Israelites, closes with hope for a greater restoration of all things: a Messianic new creation that would entail the fullest realization of covenant blessings and the universalization of the "edenic" life. With this overview of the middle of the narrative in mind, we will turn to an analysis of the three themes and their three foci in this part of the story.

New Creation Inaugurated and Redemption Achieved. There is little or occasional evidence in ancient Israel for a healed image of God or restored unity and equality of men and women, but it is significant. Israelite law and culture move away from typical expressions of patriarchy in the Ancient Near East and toward more just, egalitarian ideals in important ways (e.g., Leviticus 25; Exodus 22:21–27; Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19–21; 26:12–13). The status of women is improved, which shows that God is propelling the Israelites in a redemptive and liberating trajectory.⁴ In addition, the commandment to honor both mothers and fathers respects women as teachers of the law and guardians of the religion of Israel (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:7; cf. Proverbs 31).

Other texts recall the pre-fall, male-female relationship that embodied the image of God. Song of Songs portrays a pleasant, loving, reciprocal relationship between a man and a woman. This paradigmatic love relationship honors the edenic matrilocal marital norm from Genesis 2:24, in which the man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife (Song of Songs 3:4; 8:2). The woman and the man in Proverbs 31 respect, value, and benefit each other—a model of a restored and mutually-empowering marital relationship. These texts showcase God's covenant blessings on the obedient and God's redemption of women from the evil effects of sin.

The fruitfulness of the womb is among the explicit covenant blessings given to Israel (Leviticus 26:9; Deuteronomy 28:4), which represents a clear reversal of Genesis 3:16. Accordingly, the matriarchs of the newly-created people of God overcome the obstacles of barrenness and become fruitful. God honors Sarah and Hagar as mothers of many nations and kings (Genesis 16:10; 17:16). Israel proliferates greatly in Egypt, even under the most adverse conditions. In light of the judgment oracle of Genesis 3, the triumphs of the matriarchs and later women of Israel are expressions of the victory over the hostile serpent that resists women and the proliferation of her seed.

Thus, there is occasional evidence for restored dominion for women, some of whom are portrayed as empowered agents of redemption and

leaders of God's people. Deborah is a prophet and a judge (or ruler), who governs Israel for twenty years during Canaanite oppression, then for another forty years after a decisive victory (Judges 4:3-4; 5:31). Her rule is presented as an extension of Yahweh's reign over Israel, as Moses' leadership had been. The authoritative, prophetic leadership of the prophet Huldah (2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34) is instrumental in Josiah's massive reforms. Esther acts as a key player in the preservation of the Jews from Haman's intended annihilation.

Rebellion and Its Consequences. Despite the redemptive and restorative trajectory within it, Israel's history is typically marked by a depressing cycle of rebellion, divine punishment, and temporary spiritual renewal, which tragically eventuates in the destruction and exile of a divided Israel. The breakdown of vertical relationship with Yahweh means the breakdown of horizontal human relationships and oppression. Thus, the lower status of or injustices against women in Israel or in exile (some of which I will mention below as "problem texts") do not represent God's intentions for women, but regrettable expressions of sinful and, thus, cursed life.

Hope for a Messianic New Creation and the Future Reign of God. After the exilic death, Israel is resurrected in two ways. On one level there is an initial "restoration of Israel to the land," as recorded in books like Ezra and Nehemiah. This resurrection, however, is rather underwhelming, with sin continuing to plague the people after their partial restoration (e.g., Nehemiah 5). On the second level, there is hope

for a far greater resurrection of Israel in the context of a future eschatological redemption or new creation (Ezekiel 36-37), which has positive implications for people of all nations. While the prophets do not explicitly mention the restoration of perfect unity and equality between woman and man or the demise of patriarchy and male domination, they are included in the universal *shalom*, unity, and equity

that God will establish (see Psalms 96:10, 97:2, 99:4; Isaiah 54:1; 60:18). In the future messianic age, *all* evil effects of the Fall will be completely vanquished and all aspects of life lavishly blessed (cf. Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:17; 66:22). The new creation will be an expanded Eden.

The middle part of the grand narrative, which tells of the ancestors and the Israelites, closes with hope for a greater restoration of all things, a Messianic new creation that entails the fullest realization of covenant blessings and universalization of "edenic" life.

GLIMPING THE END OF THE GRAND NARRATIVE

Against the backdrop of Israel's expectation for God's messianic and eschatological redemptive solution to sin and oppression, God launches a final age of "new creation" through Jesus Christ as God's messiah. In Christ, God decisively inaugurates the messianic age foretold in passages like Isaiah 61 (see Luke 4:18 ff.). This is the third and last act in God's work, though it does not happen overnight. As such, the events recorded in the New Testament might be better called "the beginning of the end." In any case, the great achievements of Jesus Christ have significant implications for women, which we can again understand in terms of the three themes and their three elements of image of God, procreation, and dominion.

New Creation and Redemption. Having obeyed unto death, Christ restores the original, pre-fall humanity that the first Adam lost through disobedience. Being *the* unqualified image of God (Colossians 1:15), Christ restores the image of God in both woman and man and creates humanity's "new self" (Ephesians 4:24). In addition, Christ reconciles humanity to the Father and to one another, restoring loving relationship with God and with fellow human beings. The various distinctions – male and female, free or slave, Jews or Gentiles – that resulted in social stratification, discrimination, and oppression are abrogated in Christ, in whose "body" the oneness of the new humanity is created (Ephesians 2:14-18; Galatians 3:27-28). Furthermore, Jesus declares to his disciples, women as much as men: "I do not call you servants any longer" but "friends" (John 15:15). His friends are given the mission of being "fruitful" (John 15:16).

This fruitfulness finds a new expression in spiritual rather than biological children. By making disciples, Christians become the victorious "seed of the woman" in a corporate sense. Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection disable the serpent (cf. Genesis 3:15) and grant Christ, the representative human king, all authority (Matthew 28:18; cf. Daniel 7:14). Then, just as Adam and Eve were given dominion over the whole earth, so now the disciples of Christ, male and female alike, are given the delegated authority to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; cf. Daniel 7:27).

Even though Jesus lived and worked within the conventions appropriate in fallen, patriarchal culture (e.g., his twelve apostles were all male), he sometimes broke out of them. He welcomed and taught women as his followers, disciples, friends, and evangelists (e.g., the Samaritan woman at the well and the women who were the first heralds of his resurrection). What Jesus began is then given a fuller expression in the post-Pentecost church.

With his resurrection and ascension, Christ sets the stage for a new order for women and men alike. This new age begins in earnest at Pentecost. Women are explicitly included from the beginning as key players in the unfolding drama. Peter proclaims that the Spirit of God is now being poured out on all people, men and women, old and young, free and slave, enabling them to prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; cf. Joel 2:28 ff.). Through this

“democratization” of the Holy Spirit, the early followers of Jesus experience a greater egalitarianism. The Spirit equips “all flesh” with spiritual gifts, empowering them to be fruitful ministers of the gospel. Accordingly, there is a greater freedom than within Old Testament Israel for women to be leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, elders, deacons)—as evidenced by Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, and more. In principle, women are positioned to be equal partners in the advancement of the gospel and the kingdom of God.

Rebellion and Its Consequences. Yet, the realities of living with imperfect women and men within fallen and corrupted social orders—whether Jewish or Greco-Roman societies—required that a number of accommodations or restrictions would be imposed upon marginalized groups (including women and slaves) for the sake of the gospel. The restrictions do not represent God’s abiding rule for his covenant people, but are ways to navigate through situations that could defame Christ’s name or bring confusion, thus hindering the furtherance of the gospel. It should be noted that these temporary restrictions on woman’s roles (as we saw in the Old Testament) often represent a significant improvement over the status of women in surrounding cultures, again showing a redemptive direction in which God is moving the people of God, a trajectory that should continue until the divine ideal is reached.

Consummation. Despite the ongoing reminders of sin, including patriarchy in both Church and society, early Christian communities were animated by the hope that both sin and its effects would one day be completely overcome at the second coming of Christ. This hope is consistent with the Old Testament expectation of the ultimate fulfillment of the messianic hope. On that day, this sin-corrupted age will come to a close and God’s perfect kingdom of universal justice and peace will be consummated.

READING THE PROBLEM TEXTS

The grand narrative sketched thus far helps us to respond rightly to some much-discussed “problem texts” related to women. In the Old Testament, there are many problematic texts for women. In Judges, we find the shocking treatment of Jephthah’s daughter in chapter 11 and of the Levite’s concubine/wife in chapter 19. While these do not explicitly denounce the atrocious violence in the stories, the larger narrative context *does* denounce it as an extreme expression of lawlessness. Likewise, the stories of Bathsheba and Tamar in 2 Samuel demonstrate the horrific sins of those in power and indirectly expose and judge such misuse of power against women. The apparent divine silence concerning the rape of Tamar and Absalom’s adulteries is better understood as indication of divine punishment of sin through the “natural” process of sowing sin and reaping its evil fruits (cf. Romans 1:24 ff.). This means that sexist attitudes and actions in these texts are not an inevitable feature of human life, but evils that God seeks to root out and deter.

In the New Testament, two “problem” Pauline passages stand out: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. The particular difficulty of these two passages, as “complementarian” interpreters have been quick to point out, is that they appear to ground abiding role-restrictions for women in God’s original intentions for creation. If this is the case, then it would provide significant evidence that the way of interpreting Genesis 1-3 I have offered is either completely mistaken or runs counter to New Testament texts. However, these controversial texts should not cause us to question this grand narrative approach. Let me explain why.

First, we need to remember that Paul and his associates were writing for a “time between the times,” between the epochal events of the First and Second Coming of Christ. In keeping with the “already but not yet” character of God’s kingdom in the church age, any restrictions or accommodations these texts make do not represent God’s ideal or final will for women, but are temporary means of negotiating gender matters within fallen social contexts. For example, in Ephesus, to which 1 Timothy was written, there was a danger of certain people—especially untrained women—promoting false teaching that could undercut both the gospel and the church founded on it. In that light, it makes sense that Paul would temporarily limit the role of women as church teachers and leaders, until they were properly trained.

Second, since the New Testament does not make clear distinctions between women and men in regard to central theological and ethical matters (e.g., sin, grace, salvation, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, discipleship, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission), interpretation of the few passage that do speak of clear sex or gender distinctions should be guided by the general principles or narrative contours established by those central matters. In other words, given the character of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15 as situation-specific teaching in contextual, occasional letters, their restrictions or accommodations should not be used to inculcate a static or abiding church polity in which men are always leaders and women always followers.

Instead of allowing these texts, let alone faulty interpretations of them, determine the way we read the grand narrative and women’s place within it, the grand narrative should limit and guide the interpretation of these texts. This is hermeneutical good sense. With more insightful, canonical interpretation (and sometimes more accurate translations), these texts can be liberated from the undeserved label of “problem texts.”

With these preliminary considerations in mind, let me briefly indicate how the three main narrative themes (new creation inaugurated, rebellion and its consequences, and hope of redemption/final new creation) with their three foci (image of God, fruitfulness, and dominion) are significant for interpreting 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Paul makes two appeals in the first passage, one for men (v. 7) and one for women (v. 10), which are supported by creational details about the man

and woman in Genesis 1-2. The appeal to men is that “a man ought not to have his head veiled,” which means, according to verse 14, that a man should not have long hair. The reason for this is that “he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man” (vv. 7bc-8). At first glance, it would appear that verse 7bc is directly contradicting Genesis 1:27 and promoting a theology of male superiority (as many have insisted). But letting the grand narrative bear upon the text leads to rather surprising conclusions. First of all, we need to note that in verse 14 Paul appeals to “nature” (rather than God’s created order) to achieve his situational goal of affirming culturally-defined differentiation between male hairstyle (short as honorable) and female hairstyle (long as glorious). Second, we need to note that according to Genesis 1-2, the woman is also the image of God as much as man, which implies that she is also the glory of God. Third, Paul’s omission of such obvious truths about woman’s creational identity, therefore, must be understood as another “move” to achieve his situational goals and not as an attempt to offer a settled and measured theological conviction about women. By affirming man as the image and glory of God, he supports his point that the man should not wear a culturally offensive hairstyle that would dishonor God. Affirming that the woman is also “the image and glory of God” would not help him set up a strong differentiation between culturally acceptable hairstyles for men and women. Fourth, when Paul says that “woman is the glory of man” (v. 7c), he is likely not offering a theological innovation or new revelation, but a rabbinic-style interpretative conclusion based on Genesis 2:20-23, in which the “not good” state of the man being alone is gloriously rectified by the formation of the woman, which is met with the man’s joyful praise of the woman. In other words, Paul suppresses the more obvious truths about the woman as the image and glory of God and highlights the more subtle point about her relation to the man. This creates a contrast between the man and woman that helps him make his case about appropriate, distinct hairstyles. Paul’s insight that the woman is the glory of man – that is, the woman is the crown, or completion, of humankind – far from asserting the superiority of man, upholds the woman’s exceedingly exalted status.

Paul’s appeal to the woman is, when translated straightforwardly without added words, “the woman ought to have authority over her head” (v. 10), that is, over her metaphorical head, which is “man” according to verse 3. The main biblical reason for the women’s authority is given in verse 9, “neither was man created because of woman, but woman because of man” (my translation). While this verse has been interpreted to mean that the woman exists for the man’s sake (see the New American Standard Bible) or for his use, reading it in light of Genesis 2 produces wholly new results. We recall that in Genesis 2, the woman was made because the man was incomplete without an equal “helper” or partner. The woman was given

equal authority with the man to help him serve and guard the Garden, especially from the threats of the tempter who was seeking to overthrow them. In a cultural context that otherwise suppressed women's voice, Paul is appealing to the creational story to encourage the women of Corinth to reclaim their creational authority to pray and prophesy freely, not only over women, but also over men. Since such authority was controversial for women (especially for many Jews), Paul has to highlight it here (v. 10). Yet, in an apparent effort to curtail any overestimation or misapplication of the authority of women, Paul then reinforces the interdependence, mutuality, and complementarity of men and women and their ultimate dependence on God in verses 11-12. This interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is consistent with the examples of biblical women who did speak or prophesy authoritatively over both men and women and even the entire nation of Israel (e.g., Deborah and Huldah). Jesus' teaching of women and affirmation of women as authoritative witnesses, which present a strong departure from the Palestinian Jewish culture of his day, also support this interpretation, not to mention Paul's unqualified recognition of women leaders in several epistles.

What about 1 Timothy 2:11-15, which issues a requirement and a prohibition: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission" (v. 11) and "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent" (v. 12)? Why would Paul say this, when God used women to both teach and exercise authority over men and women throughout the Old Testament and even in the churches with which Paul was familiar?⁵ It is most natural to say that the restriction on the woman here must be temporary and contextual, restricted to the churches in Ephesus or similar churches. But there is a potential challenge to this interpretation in verses 13 and 14. Paul finds the reasons for the new requirement to learn and the prohibition to teach in the creational order of Genesis 2 ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve," v. 13) and in Eve's deception in Genesis 3 ("the woman was deceived," v. 14). Paul's grounding his points in the creation order and the Fall narrative has been used to assert male superiority (assuming temporal priority means ontological superiority) and to institute universal role restrictions for women (assuming all women are gullible). But since our grand narrative affirms the creational and redemptive equality between women and men and highly esteems godly and authoritative women prophets and teachers of Israel and the early church, we can press on for a better explanation of Paul's appealing to Genesis 2-3. I suggest that since Paul is drawing on the narrative flow of Genesis without making the details explicit, he is offering Genesis 2-3 as an illustrative example. Paul's logic would run like this: "Adam was formed first," meaning that he received God's instructions directly (Genesis 2:16-17) and was thus more qualified to teach and make decisions. The woman was made after God had given Adam the command about the tree, and thus was more susceptible to deception. But since she made the decision to eat the forbidden fruit entirely independent of the man

and even gave some to him to eat, she usurped authority over man. The woman Paul describes in verses 13-14 is a paradigm of any one in danger of deception due to lack of proper education. Thus, for the unlearned woman of Ephesus, Paul prescribes the medicine of learning in quietness and submission – the opposite of “teaching and usurping authority.” That said, the writer’s earlier directive that women “should learn” albeit “in silence with full submission” (v. 11) is already a significant redemptive improvement on the Jewish traditions that barred women from education in Torah. Education in the Church serves as a long-term solution to the problem of women and other uneducated persons being deceived and deceiving others with false teaching. As such, this text does not pose a great threat to a woman’s identity or rights, but lays down a wise ground rule through which properly trained and educated women teachers such as Priscilla can be produced.

1 Timothy 2 concludes with a strange, yet positive, statement: “Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Timothy 2:15). Without resolving all the interpretative issues this verse raises, there are reasonable interpretations that highlight its emphasis on redemption for women in intentional contrast to verse 14’s emphasis on the fall of Eve. Most importantly, the Greek term for “saved” here can also mean “kept safe.” When translated as such, the text simply states that godly Christian women are “kept safe through childbearing,” which as a result of the Fall became a dangerous ordeal with many women’s lives being lost during child-

birth.⁶ In this interpretation, God’s redemptive work in godly women generally alleviates or overcomes the post-fall “frustrations” in fruitfulness or procreation. This is in keeping with similar redemptive themes in the Old Testament, such as the midwives’ testimony that the Hebrew women were not like the Egyptian women, but were more vigorous and gave quick and uncomplicated live births (Exodus 1:19).

Understanding 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in light of the grand narrative of creation, fall, and redemption or consummation begins to dissolve and relativize the problems in these texts. In light of this larger story, we see that God’s intention from the beginning has been to bring both women and men into the fullness of life as those created in the image God and invested with resultant dignity and responsibility. Whether in the form

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of the mitigation of sin and its effects in the Old Testament or in the fuller salvation available through Christ and the Holy Spirit, those who are redeemed are ultimately not bound to live within the limits of any sinful social order, including patriarchy. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”! (2 Corinthians 3:17; cf. Acts 2:17 ff.).

Yet even as the texts of Genesis 3, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Timothy 2 would warn us, our freedom must not be abused, but must be used in godly, loving dependence on God and interdependence with other members of Christ. Before the day of God’s consummated kingdom, God calls us to exercise self-giving love that is patient with others who, like us, are in process. We recognize that no person, church, or culture is yet fully sanctified or redeemed, but we hope and expect that one day they will be.

NOTES

1 For a more detailed defense of a grand narrative approach in respect to the issue of patriarchy in the Old Testament, see my article “Patriarchy, Biblical Authority, and the Grand Narrative of the Old Testament,” in *Tamar’s Tears: Evangelical Engagements with Feminist Old Testament Hermeneutics*, edited by Andrew Sloane (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 274-314. The current article condenses my longer treatment of the Old Testament from this chapter and adds a treatment of the New Testament.

2 The Hebrew term *’itstsavon* is usually translated into “pain” in relation to the woman in 3:16 and into “toil” or “painful toil” in relation to the man in 3:17, but both are unusual translations for the term *’itstsavon*. The more usual translation would be “distress” or “sorrow.”

3 The Hebrew term *heron* is not the typical word for childbearing or conception. See Umberto Cassuto’s comments in support of this in *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, translated by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 164 ff. A more literal translation of *heron* is given by the Septuagint, *stenagmon*, which means “sighing” or “groaning.”

4 See William Webb’s helpful comments on a “redemptive” hermeneutic and trajectory in his *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

5 I here assume that Paul is the author of 1 Timothy, but my argument does not depend on this assumption.

6 See the recent, able defense of this interpretation by Moyer Hubbard in “Kept Safe through Childbearing: Maternal Mortality, Justification by Faith, and the Social Setting of 1 Timothy 2:15,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 55:4 (December 2012), 743-762.



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