

## All Too Human: Patriarchy and Human Nature

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### Introduction

What is patriarchy? The question is not an easy one to answer: ten pastors would give ten different answers, each with its own nuance. However, among this diverse and widespread movement there are a few general principles which must be biblically analyzed. In fact, the patriarchy movement makes several claims in regards to biblical manhood and womanhood that have significant implications concerning anthropology. As a theological term, anthropology refers to the study of mankind, in other words, what the Bible teaches concerning human nature. This is a very important aspect of theology because the human mind is darkened by sin and thus can only understand its own nature by divine revelation. For this reason, one's view of anthropology is critically important; this subject covers human nature in its original state, its fallen state, its redeemed state, and its glorified state. The two-fold question posed by this essay is this: what does patriarchy teach concerning human nature, and is that teaching biblical?

In this day of constant partisanship and in-fighting, it is natural to doubt the necessity of such a work. While the reader may be asking, "Does this really matter?" the author is asking himself, "Will these words make any difference?" If this patriarchal movement were relegated to a fringe group with no influence, then perhaps this essay would not be necessary for the average church member in the pew. However, this is not the case. The spread of this teaching has been prolific due to the widespread use of social media and, perhaps more importantly, the rise of reactionism among young Christian men. The appeal of patriarchal doctrine can readily be seen in this statement from one of the movement's prominent teachers: "God has always promised tremendous blessings for those who keep His covenant faithfully."<sup>1</sup> The American culture is full

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Federal Husband* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 72.

of sin, and this sin is leading to the destruction of traditional conservative America. Patriarchy, along with its sister doctrines of theonomy and dominionism, makes a grand promise to restore the prosperity of the strong Christian man. In this, there is much in common with the more familiar breed of prosperity theology: the Health and Wealth gospel. As long as one has enough faith, as long as one practices Christianity the right way, then God will bring earthly blessing.

While that may appear to be an overly harsh statement, it is not hyperbolic. Patriarchal doctrine is a great danger to young Christian men who are being readily influenced by charismatic “Internet theologians.” This essay analyzes this doctrine from a biblical, Baptist perspective. The only question that ought to matter to the Christian when determining the rightness of a doctrine is this: does Scripture clearly and plainly teach this? Three sections will be considered in this analysis: first, the subject of hermeneutics; second, the subject of manhood, and; third, the subject of womanhood. As a pastor, the author has no interest in engaging in rhetorical devices or personal attacks. The only interest of the author is providing a warning to those who may be influenced by this teaching and to those who desire to see a biblical response to this doctrine. In the course of this essay, the author argues that the propositions of patriarchal doctrine are antithetical to the teaching of Scripture and, consequently, antithetical to the gospel itself.

## **Hermeneutics and Covenants**

### *The Patriarchal Hermeneutic*

The subject of hermeneutics is incredibly important: it is the method by which one interprets, and consequently applies, Scripture. While there are varying levels of disagreements among brethren, there is a correct way and an incorrect way to interpret the Bible. For example, though the disagreement between the credobaptist and the paedobaptist is not a test of whether or

not one is a Christian, one of those methods of understanding Scripture is right and the other is wrong. The patriarchy hermeneutic is a variation of the Presbyterian hermeneutic, which proposes that the New Testament must be interpreted through the lens of the Old. One representative statement demonstrating this follows: “This one covenant of grace was administered throughout history.”<sup>2</sup> The author then follows that with this statement: “Understanding the ramifications of this passage [Exodus 2:24-25] is crucial to a proper grasp of the teaching of the New Testament.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the author is understanding the New Testament through the Old Testament. However, it must be clearly emphasized that the patriarchy hermeneutic is a distortion of the historic Presbyterian hermeneutic. One Presbyterian pastor wrote this: “It is simply a poor hermeneutic to find a detailed explanation of how we should live by examining the lives of Abraham and Job. Clearly there is much to learn from the Patriarchs; but they too were sinners...living in the shadows of the preparatory and anticipatory Old Testament era.”<sup>4</sup>

This view, that the New Testament must be interpreted through the lens of the Old, is a result of the Presbyterian view of covenant theology. The key emphasis of this theology is represented in this statement: “Particular details of the covenants may vary. A definitive line of progress may be noted. Yet the covenants of God are one.”<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Johnson makes this observation: “Additionally, Presbyterian covenant theology begins with the presupposition that the various covenants in the Old and New Testaments are merely different administrations of one overarching covenant of grace.”<sup>6</sup> This is the foundational reason why the Presbyterian

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 14

<sup>4</sup> Matt Holst, “The Patriarchy Movement: Five Areas of Grave Concern,” *Reformation 21*, October 10, 2016, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/the-patriarchy-movement-five-a.php>.

<sup>5</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1981), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Johnson, *The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant and Biblical Theology* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2016), xxii.

hermeneutic and the patriarchal hermeneutic view the New Testament through the lens of the Old. The patriarchal view, like the Presbyterian view, sees the New Covenant as another administration of the same covenant of grace found in the Old Covenant. Thus, the blessings and curses that attended the Old Covenant are applicable to the saint under the New Covenant. For this reason, the patriarch views the relation of men and women in the church in the context of Old Testament Israel.

The error common to both the Presbyterian and the patriarchal hermeneutic is a failure to distinguish between the physical aspects of the various expressions of the Old Covenant which have now been abrogated and the spiritual aspects of those expressions which are eternal and fulfilled in Christ Jesus alone. One example of this is the concept of the “godly seed.” Douglas Wilson writes this: “The reason God brings husband and wife together in federal union is so that they might bring up godly offspring before Him.”<sup>7</sup> This statement comes from the Westminster Confession of Faith 24.2: “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.”<sup>8</sup> This view is derived from the Old Covenant promises to Abraham that his seed would be as the stars of the heavens. An often-cited text to support this position is Malachi 2:14-15, “Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.” The point at this juncture is not to refute this position, but rather to demonstrate that the patriarchal hermeneutic, like the Presbyterian

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Federal Husband* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 86.

<sup>8</sup> “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” *Ligonier Ministries*, May 12, 2021, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith>.

view from which it is derived, does not distinguish between the physical and spiritual aspects of the Old Covenant.

### *The Baptist Hermeneutic*

Unlike the patriarchal view, the Baptist hermeneutic may be summarized by the following principle: the New Testament is the lens by which the Old Testament must be understood. Nehemiah Coxe, an English Particular Baptist, wrote the following: “So in all our search after the mind of God in the Holy Scriptures we are to manage our inquiries with reference to Christ. Therefore the best interpreter of the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the new.”<sup>9</sup> This is not merely the perspective of historic Baptist theologians, but it is the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles. The resurrected Lord taught the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and Luke records this statement: “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”<sup>10</sup> This is the method used by Paul when he wrote to the Galatians: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”<sup>11</sup> The author of the epistle to Hebrews utilizes this hermeneutic throughout his letter, notably in the first chapter where he writes, “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”<sup>12</sup>

This hermeneutic is biblical precisely because it flows out of the New Testament teaching concerning the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Baptist hermeneutic understands that the New Covenant is distinct from the Old Covenant because the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the spiritual aspects of the Old. The author of Hebrews

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<sup>9</sup> Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald Miller, James Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press Inc, 2005), 33.

<sup>10</sup> Lk. 24:27, KJV

<sup>11</sup> Gal. 3:16, KJV

<sup>12</sup> Heb. 1:8, KJV

expresses this truth: “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”<sup>13</sup> This is the force of the apostle Paul’s argument in Galatians 4, wherein he concludes: “Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”<sup>14</sup> This is what the Lord Jesus taught: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”<sup>15</sup> The very fact that there is a New Covenant means that there is a distinction between the shadow and the fulfillment. The shadow was unable to make anything perfect, but the better hope in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ brought a perfect salvation.

The Old Covenant was dichotomous: it contained both physical/temporal aspects and spiritual/eternal aspects. This truth can be seen by a close examination of God’s covenant with Abraham. As Jeffrey Johnson puts it, “God’s covenant with Abraham has two distinct dimensions—a natural, temporal, and conditional side and a spiritual, eternal, and unconditional side.”<sup>16</sup> Genesis 17 is the fullest expression of God’s covenant with Abraham, which is developed from Genesis 12. In the first eight verses of Genesis 17, there are several “I will” statements from the Lord God Almighty, and to properly understand these verses one must start with Paul’s words in Galatians 3:16 which have already been quoted: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Abraham was promised three distinct things: 1) a people; 2) kings, and; 3) a land. As Johnson points out, “a region of dominion, a king, and a people are the three major

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<sup>13</sup> Heb. 8:13, KJV; cf. Heb. 7:18-19

<sup>14</sup> Gal. 4:30-31, KJV

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 5:17, KJV

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Johnson, *The Fatal Flaw of the Theology Behind Infant Baptism & Covenantal Dichotomism: Continuity and Discontinuity of the Divine Covenants* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2010), 208

elements that constitute a kingdom. Thus, in essence, in the Abrahamic covenant, God vowed to establish a kingdom through the seed of Abraham.”<sup>17</sup> The point here is easily observed: while there were temporal aspects of this covenant (the land of Canaan, the kings of Israel, etc.), the spiritual aspects all belong to Abraham’s Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. The temporal has passed away, and the eternal is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. The kingdom of the New Covenant is not a physical kingdom with a land and an ethnolinguistic people group; it is a spiritual, everlasting kingdom. The remaining sections of this essay are concerned with demonstrating how the patriarchal view of manhood and womanhood is necessarily antithetical to the biblical, Baptist view of manhood and woman because of this difference in hermeneutics.

## **Biblical Manhood**

### *Patriarchal Doctrine of Manhood*

The fundamental error of the patriarchal doctrine of man is that it looks back to Adam to determine how a Christian man is to live. The following is a quote from paragraph two of Vision Forum Ministries’ document entitled *The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy*, “Both man and woman are made in God’s image (their human characteristics enable them to reflect His character) and they are both called to exercise dominion over the earth.”<sup>18</sup> One prominent teacher in the patriarchy movement wrote this: “Genesis contains the blueprint for recovering manhood. ... Everything is in Genesis.”<sup>19</sup> Another prominent teacher in this movement wrote: “Adam was created to tend the garden and to exercise dominion over the earth. Eve was created to help him

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Johnson, *The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant and Biblical Theology* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Vision Forum Ministries, “The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy,” *Vision Forum Ministries*, accessed February 2, 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20100305040250/http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical\\_patriarchy.aspx](https://web.archive.org/web/20100305040250/http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical_patriarchy.aspx).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant, *It’s Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2022), 17, Kindle.

do this.”<sup>20</sup> He continues to expound upon this as the basis for lawful vocations for men and women, indicating that, in his viewpoint, Adam and Eve are the model for how Christian husbands and wives are to live. This view is becoming more and more common among conservative, Reformed Christians.

One of the key elements of the first two chapters of Genesis is the covenant of works that God made with Adam. In Genesis 2:16-17 there is a statement of Adam’s obligation in this covenant: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” This command was given in addition to the law of God that was written on Adam’s heart, and if he had kept it, he would have entered into the state of eternal happiness.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the two blessings of Genesis 1:28 (i.e., being fruitful and having dominion) are to be understood as blessings attending obedience to the covenant of works. However, in the patriarchal hermeneutic, these two blessings are not covenantal rewards for obedience, but rather creational mandates for human nature. Thus, for the patriarch, the sum and substance of human nature is to be found in Adam and Eve prior to the Fall; that is to say, for the patriarch, the chief end of man is to be fruitful and exercise dominion. In fact, this is one of the first “tenets of biblical patriarchy” espoused by Vision Forum Ministries: “Both man and woman are made in God’s image (their human characteristics enable them to reflect His character) and they are both called to exercise dominion over the earth.”<sup>22</sup>

This view effectively denies the doctrine of radical corruption. For the patriarch, a man is to look back to Adam as he was in his original state. The implication of this is that the blessings

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<sup>20</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Federal Husband* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 38.

<sup>21</sup> See Eccl. 7:29

<sup>22</sup> Vision Forum Ministries, “The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy,” *Vision Forum Ministries*, accessed February 2, 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20100305040250/http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical\\_patriarchy.aspx](https://web.archive.org/web/20100305040250/http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical_patriarchy.aspx).



mentioned in Genesis 1 are not rewards of covenant obedience, but rather creational mandates for human nature. Further, this is a denial that Adam lost those blessings and a denial that the Lord Jesus now possesses them as a reward of His covenantal obedience which is, as will be demonstrated in the next section, a denial of the biblical teaching on the subject. Since, in the patriarchal view, the original blessings of Adam were not lost, this necessarily means that his fall did not affect human nature. This is why patriarchal advocates make statements such as the following: “Thus, man still has his original instincts and still knows the principles of right action, which incline him to what is good.”<sup>23</sup> Again, this denial of radical corruption is seen in the following statement from a prominent patriarchal teacher: “There is no hint in the Bible that your aggressive instincts are a result of the fall. . . . You yearn to bend the world to your will because Adam was created to bend the world to his will.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, according to the patriarchal position, man is naturally good, but sin simply messes things up. Is this how Scripture speaks?

### *Biblical Doctrine of Manhood*

In opposition to the patriarchal position, the biblical, Baptist doctrine of man centers upon the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ and His federal headship. Throughout the Bible, the message is very clear: to properly understand the Christian life, one must look to the Savior. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11:1: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” He did not say, “Follow me as I follow Adam.” Again, Paul opens his discussion on the Christian life in Ephesians 5:1-2 writing, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” What was his exhortation to the church at

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2022), accessed February 6, 2023, 22, Kindle.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant, *It's Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2022), 25, Kindle.

Philippi? “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”<sup>25</sup> This was not only apostolic doctrine, but also apostolic example. When the disciples were beaten by the Jewish council in Acts 5, they did not rejoice that they were like Adam before he fell. Here is what Luke records: “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, this was the doctrine of the Savior Himself: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”<sup>27</sup> He did not say, “If any man would follow me, let him follow Adam in Genesis 1 and 2.” Throughout the New Testament, the exhortation is always the same: to look unto Jesus.

It is in this light that the covenant of works that God made with Adam must be understood. The fact that the blessings mentioned were covenantal rewards can readily be seen in the curses of Genesis 3 when Adam lost the blessing of dominion. The Lord God said, “cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground.”<sup>28</sup> Far from “bending the world to his will,” man must struggle even to produce enough to maintain his physical life. In other words, the earth would no longer submit to his work. Additionally, the blessing of being fruitful and multiplying became a painful burden in the curse issued to Eve in Genesis 3:16, “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” Yet even in this curse, God demonstrated mercy. He used the bearing of children throughout the Old Covenant expressions to bring forth the Messiah, the Promised Seed

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<sup>25</sup> Phil. 2:5, KJV

<sup>26</sup> Acts 5:41, KJV

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 16:24, KJV

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 3:17-19, KJV

of the Woman, of Abraham, and of David.<sup>29</sup> Each of the two blessings that Adam lost because of his disobedience were given to the Lord Jesus Christ because of his obedience. Psalm 8 is a Messianic Psalm which tells of this truth: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”<sup>30</sup> In Ephesians 1:22, Paul says that God the Father “hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” In fact, the dominion of Christ far exceeds any that was promised to Adam. Instead of extending only over physical creation, the Lord Jesus Christ has been given authority over all things in heaven and on earth: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the blessing of being fruitful and multiplying belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ; and just as his dominion is a spiritual dominion, so also this blessing is to be understood spiritually of the church. In Hebrews 2:10 it says, “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The key here is that the Father is bringing many sons unto glory through the Captain of their salvation. There is a similar idea in Romans 8:29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”<sup>32</sup> The point of all this in relation to the doctrine of manhood is evident: the Christian man must look to Christ, and not to Adam. Adam, even in his original state, is not the model for the Christian life. The Lord Jesus Christ, and he alone, is the exemplar. It is His dominion which the Christian is under, and the Christian is the fruit of His work.

Thus, the godly man, the Christian man, is the one who has been redeemed and is, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, mortifying the deeds of the flesh and pursuing the fruit of the Spirit.

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<sup>29</sup> See Gen. 9:1 (the Noachic covenant), Gen. 22:17 (the Abrahamic covenant), Lev. 26:9 (the Mosaic covenant), and 2 Sam. 7:12 (the Davidic covenant). In each of these, being fruitful is a physical aspect of the Old Covenant, and possessing dominion is reserved for the Seed (see Gal. 3:16).

<sup>30</sup> Psalm 8:6, KJV; cf. Heb. 2:8 where this text is referenced specifically to the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 28:18, KJV; cf. Ps. 110:1, 1 Pet. 3:22

<sup>32</sup> cf. Is. 8:18 and Is. 53:10

The Christian man has the mindset of Paul expressed in Romans 7:18, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.” The Christian man is the man who seeks to obey the apostolic command in 1 John 2:15, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” The Christian man is not the man who strives after worldly success or cultural change or earthly dominion, but rather the man who follows the example of Paul: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>33</sup> What is the fruit of the Spirit? What is it that the Holy Spirit is producing in us that conforms us to be like our Savior? In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul writes, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” These are the Christian virtues. These are the qualities of the Lord Jesus Christ which the Christian man (and woman) is to pursue. Put in the simplest possible terms, the Christian man is the one who follows after Christ Jesus our Lord. The patriarch, however, gives the opposite exhortation: “He [the husband] should also make clear his complete unwillingness to step in to do for her [the wife] what she neglected to do or to tolerate a lapse into the old way of doing things.”<sup>34</sup> How can this be loving one’s wife as Christ loved the church? It is the opposite of what the Lord Jesus did for His Bride. He stepped in to do for her that which she not only neglected to do but was in fact incapable of doing: obtaining righteousness and paying the penalty for her sin. This is Christian masculinity: dying to self and following in the footsteps of the Savior.

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<sup>33</sup> Phil. 3:13-14, KJV

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Federal Husband* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 26.

## **Biblical Womanhood**

### *Patriarchal Doctrine of Womanhood*

There are many conflicting statements regarding the subject of womanhood in patriarchal doctrine, but the essential principle that is common to this movement is that women are the subordinate property of their husbands. One prominent teacher in the patriarchal movement writes, “Body piercing is a mark of slavery. . . . A godly form of subordination exists in the world God made in the subordination of a wife to her husband. This is why it is fully appropriate for a godly woman to have earrings (Ezek. 16:12) or culture permitting, nose rings (Gen. 24:30; Ezek. 16:12; Exod. 35:22).”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the same author draws this implication into the intimate union of husband and wife: “In other words, however we try, the sexual act cannot be made into an egalitarian pleasuring party. A man penetrates, conquers, colonizes, plants. A woman receives, surrenders, accepts.”<sup>36</sup> This view stems from the misunderstanding of the covenant of works presented in the first two chapters of Genesis, and from the backward hermeneutic employed by patriarchal advocates. The patriarch presupposes that the Christian man is to emulate Adam pre-fall, and thus reads that presupposition into the rest of Scripture. Thus, the author quoted above makes statements such as the following: “In the hierarchical and biblical view, the relationship of women to men is *first familial*, and then as a consequence, a larger (and very complex) cultural and societal relationship between the sexes emerges.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, women are defined not by their relation to Christ, but by their relation to their husbands or fathers, depending on whether or not they are married.

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas Wilson, “Flatter My Heart, Three-Person’d God . . .,” *Blog & Mablog*, May 22, 2016, accessed February 6, 2023, <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/books/flatter-my-heart-three-persond-god.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Federal Husband* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 63.

At its roots, the patriarchal view proposes that women belong to the covenant people of God through their fathers (if they are unmarried) or their husbands (if they are married). In other words, for the patriarch, a woman is a member of the church under the federal headship or covenant headship of her husband or father. One writer says this, “Putting this together, we see that both Adam and Christ are described as representative or covenantal heads of their respective people. ... And, in marriage, *this is the kind of relationship which God commands husbands to imitate.*”<sup>38</sup> Later, the same author makes the following statement: “In this way our repentance can spread first to the church, as it is given an opportunity to receive the heads of covenant households in their official representative capacity for the first time in generations.”<sup>39</sup> Notice that this author says the church receives the “heads of covenant households.” Thus, women are not members of the church in their own standing, but only through the covenant representation of their husbands or fathers. This author makes that statement because of his fundamentally unbiblical understanding of the church: “Each covenant institution certainly does have its respective duties, but we must first understand that the covenanted institutions of church and civil society are made up of covenanted family units.”<sup>40</sup> Nowhere in Scripture will one read of the church being made up of “covenanted family units;” rather, the church is made up of biblically baptized believers. Because of its presuppositions concerning covenantal theology and particularly its hermeneutics, the patriarchal position necessarily posits that women must have another mediator: their father or husband. This sentiment is directly expressed by the author cited above: “In the same way that Christ’s federal salvation sets a man free to do right, so a husband can liberate his wife as he assumes responsibility for her.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, while

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 76.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

Christ sets men free, a woman requires a man to set her free. This position is an active and obvious denial of two crucial doctrines of the gospel: the equality of men and women in the church and the sole Mediatorship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*The Biblical Doctrine of Womanhood*

In contrast, the biblical and Baptist doctrine of womanhood teaches that men and women are equal members of the church and that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the Mediator between God and all people. The Scripture very clearly teaches that the primary relationship between a Christian man and a Christian woman, regardless of their marital status, is that of brother and sister in Christ. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:27-29, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” It is obvious that Paul is neither destroying the distinction between male and female (otherwise he would not give specific instructions for husbands and wives in his other epistles) nor is he denying the God-ordained order of the home and church (that men are to lead). Rather, Paul is, in fact, refuting the unbiblical idea that sees women as subordinate Christians. All are one in Christ Jesus, regardless of one’s sex or financial position or ethnic heritage. This is the fundamental relationship of all Christians, even for husband and wife. In fact, the union of brother and sister in Christ determines the believers’ union as husband and wife.<sup>42</sup> This is why the apostle Paul prefaces his remarks on husbands and wives by reminding the Ephesians that they are to be “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”<sup>43</sup> This truth necessarily refutes the patriarchal concept that a woman belongs to the church through the covenant representation of her father or

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<sup>42</sup> see “The Order of Marriage” in T. D. Higgins, *A Heavenly Portrait: Marriage as a Type of Christ and the Church* (Bardstown, KY, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> Eph. 5:21, KJV

husband. If a woman is truly a joint-heir in Christ, then she belongs to the church because she is covenantally represented by the Savior. There is only one Federal Head of the Christian, and His name is the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this equality, there is a God-ordained order both for the household and the church. Paul writes in Eph. 5:22, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” Notice the word “yourselves;” it is not the husband’s job to make his wife submit. She is to voluntarily follow his lead. The word translated “submit” in the King James Version “is used to describe the way in which things or ideas are arranged in a logical manner. This submission is not subservience; the wife is not lesser than her husband.”<sup>44</sup> The husband is to be the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. However, unlike the patriarchal view, this does not mean that the husband is the federal head of the wife. Rather, it means that as Christ leads the church by loving her at the cost of himself, so a husband is to love his wife at the cost of himself. In his summary statement, the apostle says in Eph. 5:33, “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” If that meant that the husband is to love his wife by being her covenant head, then it would also mean that a man is his own covenant head. This is, of course, absurd because the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church. This is the economical, logical order of the household: the husband is to lead and the wife is to follow. This same order is found in the church. Only men are permitted to be officers in the church because women are not permitted to exercise authority over men.<sup>45</sup> Of course, men are also to be submissive in the church. In Hebrews 13:17 it says, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is

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<sup>44</sup> T. D. Higgins, *A Heavenly Portrait: Marriage as a Type of Christ and the Church* (Bardstown, KY, 2022), 58. (Author’s proof-copy; page number may vary).

<sup>45</sup> See 1 Tim. 2:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:1, 12.



unprofitable for you.” The apostle Peter makes the same statement in 1 Pet. 5:5, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” The key, again, is voluntary submission. It is not the pastor’s responsibility to make the members of his church submit to him, nor is it the husband’s responsibility to make his wife submit to him. The layman is to submit him or herself to the pastor, and the wife is to submit herself to her husband as unto the Lord.

It is true that a woman needs a man to be her mediator before God. In fact, every person needs a man to be their mediator before God. This is why the apostle Paul told Timothy, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”<sup>46</sup> This is the great hope of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: that He, and He alone, is our Great High Priest who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is one reason why the New Covenant is a better covenant: men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, all are brought into the fold of Christ and are accepted by God in Christ Jesus alone. There is not one plan of salvation for men and another plan for women. All are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ and by Him alone. In fact, the three words, “in Christ alone,” are the foundational words of the doctrine of redemption. All of salvation, from beginning to end, is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Any doctrine which denies this truth is antithetical to the gospel itself, and must be condemned as a false teaching.

### **Conclusion**

Having considered each of these three key points, hermeneutics and covenant theology, biblical manhood, and biblical womanhood, the only conclusion to which the author can arrive is that patriarchy is a doctrine which is antithetical to Scripture and to the gospel itself. This

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<sup>46</sup> 1 Tim. 2:5-6, KJV

teaching is not simply misguided, but it is opposed to the very truths that are foundational to the gospel message. The author makes no statement regarding the salvation of any individual, for it is not his place to judge the hearts of men. However, the Lord Jesus did tell his disciples, “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”<sup>47</sup> Are the fruits of the advocates for patriarchal doctrine, are their words which proceed from their hearts, indicative of the Scriptural truths laid out in the essay above? The answer is no. The author cannot know if these teachers are saved or not, but he can know that their teaching is at odds with that of the Bible. If any person, including the author of this essay, teaches anything which is contrary to Scripture, then may his words be forever forgotten and refuted. Let every person who calls himself or herself a Christian look only to the inspired Word of God as their only sure and infallible rule of faith, life, and practice. Let the prayer of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:18 be the prayer of every Christian: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

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<sup>47</sup> Matt. 7:16, KJV

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