



**ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN
IN
CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND CHURCH:
MODELS OF CHANGE COMPATIBLE
WITH SCRIPTURE**

PREFACE

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These lectures constitute a reflection on a lifetime of Christian experience in the Churches of Christ, as a member of this body of believers and as a teacher in its educational program. They also represent a culmination of years of reading in theology, since my retirement from the academic setting in 1991. There has been encouragement to pursue this study from friends too numerous to mention. At the public level, the opportunity to present the results of the initial investigation of this topic was provided by the Central Church of Christ in Stockton, California, as well as the Pleasantview Church of Christ in Pleasanton, California. Both congregations engaged in discussion, in class format, of the thesis of the present lectures over a period of several months. The stimulus for reducing the material to a more systematic form is to be credited to the gracious invitation by Dr. Jerry Rushford and Pepperdine University to address this topic at the University's Spring Bible Lectures in 1996. The provision of the forum for the presentation of this material does not imply endorsement, on the part of the University, of the ideas expressed. The responsibility for the content of the lectures remains with the author.

In the oral and written presentation on "The Roles of Men and Women in Contemporary Culture and Church: Models of Change Compatible with Scripture," there has been a recognition of the exploratory nature of the presentation of models of change. Change is a concept sometimes embraced all too eagerly by the larger society and by contrast, it is too much feared in some Christian circles. The Scripture declares that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. However, human history is dominated by transition in all its forms. The presentation of the living God in Scripture recognizes the paradox of the Unchanging nature of God within the Changing relationship which he sustains to his creation. The models presented in this lecture series attempt to address forthrightly the issue of how change is to occur within the unchanging gospel, especially in relation to our social roles as male and female. The reader is expected to remain actively critical, yet open to explore potential new understanding of a vital issue for the present and future church.

Lecture number one and number two were transcribed from audio and video tapes of the live presentation. In written form, they reflect the editing and adaptation from the notes and the tapes. In the first two lectures, some of the style of the oral presentation is retained. Due to a medical emergency experienced by the presenter following lecture two, the third lecture was delivered orally from the author's notes by John Wright and Mark Love. I am indebted to their kindness in providing this service to those attending the lecture series. The notes for lecture three were edited for the final form found in the current text. This will provide the reader

with a fuller statement of the topic. Following the three lectures, I have included selected papers which present thinking on topics related to the need for models of change in the Stone-Campbell Reformation or Restoration Movement. These papers open up a discussion of hermeneutical issues which will be pertinent to the implementation of models of change.

The presentation contained herein is designed for thoughtful discussion. We have freely disagreed with some viewpoints expressed by others. We hope that our language has not been discourteous to anyone. Our intent is to openly and fairly address the issues without any desire to engender strife. The church needs to maintain a spirit of humility in this discussion, which touches all of us, because it concerns those with whom we are in daily relationship. When we address issues related to our roles as men and women, we are not concerned with issues "out there," nor with an anonymous "they," but rather with those who stand in the circle of nearness with us day by day.

With regard to the content of the lectures, we have attempted to open up a definite point of view with respect to "change." There is no desire to consider the ideation as novel. We have provided references for some of the material; however, the extensive and intensive nature of the discussion on this topic today makes it impossible to accredit all ideas to prior statements in publication elsewhere. The vast amount of contemporary writing on this topic, which tends to be reviewed repeatedly by scholars, leaves one unaware of the source of one's own ideas on the matter. We are grateful for the enormous labor provided by others, even when we can no longer identify and directly acknowledge our indebtedness.

In the rehearsal and constant rethinking of the material over the past several years, as well as in the many hours involved in writing, editing and preparation of the final form of the lectures, I express my deepest appreciation to my wife, Linda, for her patient labor of love in seeing this project to conclusion.

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“from the author”

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest and willingness to read and react to my Pepperdine Lectures on the Roles of Men and Women in Contemporary Culture and Church: Proposed Models of Change Compatible with Scripture. Your own involvement in this process speaks to a willingness to serve the Kingdom of God. I have oft recalled the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes who stated that “life is passion and action and the one who fails to engage in the passion and action of life will be judged by those who come after as never having lived.” I know that you are aware that this issue is not just an intellectual one but is equally psychological, social and personal. Social change is usually a slow and difficult process. I am not too optimistic about major changes on this topic for those of my generation. However, I have been pleasantly surprised to find many seniors who can grapple with the subject openly. It does help to be a senior in addressing the older generation. I think we must first educate, build a consensus and then change practice. This is a result of my personal experience in the radical 60’s and the student movement which was underway in the closing phase of my Ph.D. program at Berkeley. When I served on the faculty of the sister campus of the University of California at Davis, I was one of a number of faculty chosen by the Chancellor to serve on a faculty committee which attempted to mediate student-institutional concerns. I remember well a senior faculty member trying to persuade students that social change took time in a large system like the University of California. He used the illustration of the “Big System” versus “Little System” and gave the example that one could turn a small motorboat around almost instantly and within its own length. If one tried to do this with the enormous aircraft carrier, the Hornet, which happened to be in the Bay at the time of his speech, such a sudden change would result in chaos and destruction. Oratory notwithstanding, we weren’t completely successful. I think we have a big system with a very long tradition where practices take on sacred tones when we try to bring about change in church.

I wish to point out some things that may be helpful in looking at what I am proposing in these lectures. I am saying that I believe one can be faithful

to the Gospel while teaching and practicing either a patriarchal or an egalitarian mode of male-female roles. I am proposing that the Biblical world status with regard to social roles IS NOT NOW and NEVER WAS intended as part of the gospel of Christ, whether patriarchal male-subordinate female, patriarchal father-subordinated female child, totalitarian dictator-subservient citizen or master-slave.

By the end of the third lecture, I hope that the basis for “prying apart” these aspects of the Biblical text will be apparent. There is redundancy in the lectures which may result in some tedious reading. Having conversed with others who had presented at Pepperdine, I learned correctly from them that the audience would tend to vary widely from day to day. It was necessary to allow each lecture to stand alone as nearly as possible. This advice proved pertinent as the first day about 100 were present while by the second day the 160 chairs in the room were filled with lines standing in both entryways, something over 200 trying to hear. I was glad that I had planned for a redundancy – and I think the redundancy helps with the concept development, as each repetition enhances by adding new material.

If my proposed models were adopted, I could envision a future situation in a congregation wherein a woman could step up to the pulpit in the morning service and read the passages in 1 Cor. 11:; 1 Cor. 14:; Eph. 5: and 1 Tim. 2: and then she could provide a full exposition following the reading. The congregation would not feel that her very action violated and set aside everything these verses represented. This would be the case because they had come to understand that the social roles of the New Testament age were “purely historical accidents” and that these roles never were part of the Unchanging Gospel but had always been an expression of the “Form of Discipleship”. I accept as a “given” that the N.T. world was “patriarchal” and I document this fact. These verses will always be part of the NT text and need to be read and pondered for all time. They represent the “application” of the “essence of the gospel” (God’s disclosure in Jesus as Lord and Savior) and the application of our call to the pattern of the messiah (this concept is explicated in the lectures). These verses represent the “reality” that we are to follow the pattern of the messiah in a patriarchal culture which we seek to redeem and we should equally follow that same pattern when we live out the gospel in an “egalitarian” society.

This approach allows these verses to stand without a tortuous exegesis that attempts to make the NT world and the NT church into an “egalitarian” one. I think one will always be on the defensive when attempting to follow this path. Unless one takes the scissors to the NT, the church will continue for all time to read 1 Cor. 11, 1 Cor. 14, Eph. 5, and 1 Tim. 2: . I think the approach I am proposing frees us from trying to pit

scripture against scripture. I see attempts to justify a woman's role in church leadership by appealing to the fact that "God gifts us all, male and female, and that we should use all gifts". This argument, so I think, means that we place a higher value on the scripture texts which refer to our gifts in opposition to the texts which stress female subordination in all its forms in the NT patriarchal world. This approach seems to ignore the fact that the "gifts" were certainly a prominent part of the NT experience and Paul's teaching. Whatever it means to have received the gifts of God, these were certainly being exercised under apostolic direction and, furthermore, it demonstrates that one can fulfill one's responsibility for these gifts within a Patriarchal cultural setting. In contending for the development of Models of Change with regard to social roles, I stress that our responsibility to our gifts in an egalitarian setting is equally a response to God's "gifting us" but, in a different manner, in order to be relevant to our historical culture. My interpretational stance does not involve an overvaluing of one set of scriptural texts, namely those dealing with "gifts", while undervaluing another set of texts relating to hierarchical sex roles. I think this is a more systematic position.

In teaching classes on this topic, I repeatedly stress that the verses on subordination should be left in their simple, plain meaning. They are "extremely" appropriate to the world in which they were written. I document the patriarchal nature of the ancient world both Biblical and Pagan from cultural anthropology and from historical studies. We must take note of the fact that the patriarchal nature of the ancient world was true outside the Judeo-Christian stream of history as well as within it. An interesting summation of this fact, which agrees with my contention, is found in the recent work on "The Jesus Quest" by Ben Witherington III. His comments offer a fitting illustration of my more extended argument and I quote it as follows:

*"To understand the Galilee of Jesus' day we need to be reminded of the social values and structures that undergird religious life. First, Galilee, **like the rest of the Mediterranean world**, was a patriarchal and androcentric society. It was not merely male dominated de facto, but was set up so that males would dominate, assuming almost all the power and leadership roles in the society, both political and religious. By androcentric I mean that this society viewed life from a man's point of view. Decisions were made, property was bought and sold, and marriages were contracted in ways that promoted male interests, ideals and views about society. It was in almost every respect a man's world." (pp. 32-33)*

By the end of the series of lectures, I have repeatedly attempted to show that the patriarchal instructions in the scripture text are no more appropriate to the "Form of our Discipleship" today than the instructions

in the Biblical text for the behavior of master and slave, patriarchal parent-child, citizen-emperor. This viewpoint doesn't get us into trying to remake the early Christian world and its history which is so divergent from the cultural experience in a Modern Western Democracy. In the Roman world of Paul's day, it would have been inappropriate for the church to have set a public example of installing women as overseers of the congregations. It would have been provocative in the "political" and "revolutionary" sense in that culture. It is not strange at all that there are no listing of so-called qualifications for women as elders. Women would not normally be placed in such roles in the first century nor in the intervening centuries down to recent times. This understanding of the Form of our Discipleship as "conforming" to the sensitivities of culture would need to be the new "consensus" in congregations that install women in oversight roles today. In modern Iran, a Christian group would simply not even discuss such a possibility due to the severe governmental stance on "patriarchy" and the determined policy of not mere subordination but actual subjugation of women by men. In this setting today, the Christian emphasis would look like the NT one, in that it would stress "mutuality" in the interest of training for "benevolent patriarchy".

At the end of lecture three, I look at the practical issues. Due to my lifetime experience in a secular university setting, I saw the practical outworking of instances where we see a complete role-reversal with regard to career. We had women at the University who had the "primary" career and the husband had a secondary one. In our culture, as in most, this is an unusual pattern. In the models which I propose, such issues are of no concern except to the couple involved. I think Christian women need to write and speak on the issues of role change since they can be more sensitive to many aspects of these changes and their impact on the family. I would not want to dictate the way in which couples choose to regulate their own married life and their own career pattern. Who does what is a matter of "mutuality". I think we need to protect the right of families and individuals to follow either a "traditional" pattern with regard to male-female roles or with regard to an "egalitarian" pattern. I try to distinguish the concept of "egalitarianism" from that of "mutuality", with the notion that "mutuality" may be the better model for those committed to a life in the "pattern of the Messiah" -- as delineated in the lectures.

What I hope to communicate is that in this series of lectures and in these proposed Models of Change, I am not attempting to expand opportunities for women to serve in subordinate capacities, which I see to be the end result of the "heavy" exegetical work on the Patriarchal texts of the NT by Evangelical scholars. I am convinced that the best that can result from all this effort and the best of intentions is nothing more than a modified or "benevolent patriarchy". I frankly no longer believe this is the best way

to honor the Gospel of Christ in our own particular culture. I also firmly believe that those who loudly quote proof-texts pointing to the subordination of women, a fact for the ancient world; these individuals are proclaiming “culture – not gospel”. They hug the NT culture for example, as a sacred part of the Unchanging Gospel. Such an approach clearly subordinates the Gospel of Christ to Culture. It simply happens to be an ancient culture. Many who make this appeal delight in claiming that change in sex roles is “mere accommodation” to modern culture and fail to see their practice is the one that subordinates the Gospel to the culture contemporary with the Scripture text. The models which I am proposing are based on the fact that social roles, whether patriarchal or egalitarian, are not “salvation” concepts but merely the Form of Discipleship within a particular setting. They are matters of indifference. The traditional position makes them “critical salvation events” and thereby is guilty of making first century culture part of the Unchanging Gospel. Such a position is precariously close to “idolatry” in that it makes an “absolute” out of the “relativity” of culture.

I have urged that we enter a conversation on these matters. The Models which I propose are put forward as “one approach” and not “the models”. They should be evaluated in an open conversation hopefully guided by the Spirit. I am not contending for a “rush to change” nor interested in “change for change sake”. I recognize that “cultural change” is a risky game and perhaps we may have to accommodate to “tradition” by initially expanding the role of women in the form of a “benevolent patriarchy” where men are still the “real” leaders. In the long haul, to assume that this addresses the real issue, I believe to be mistaken. Far better that we say “patriarchy” is clearly taught in the NT and was the appropriate teaching in its “mission”. Far better that we disentangle the social role issue from the Gospel and proclaim that in an “egalitarian” setting, these patriarchal instructions do not apply along with master-slave rules and a host of others which we have cited. I am aware that ultimate goals in the form of the “ideals of the Kingdom of God” must needs to be “attenuated” by what in the philosophy of Ethics is called “Middle Axioms” or “mediating” rules. These rules reckon with the fact that “social reality undergirded by long tradition” can’t leap in one bound to some “ultimate ideal” but middle axioms must be worked out that represent the “best achievement” we can make now. This sounds awfully pragmatic but I do know that groups move peaceably, if at all, by slowly reaching a new “consensus”. I do not know whether the rapid social change in the larger society will give us the time in the church to rethink our way to a new consensus.

I invite you to become part of this “passion and action” of our time by wrestling with the first phase of this endeavor, namely the

“conceptualization” of “models” for change that strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Yours in Christ’s Service

Kenneth Shrable