Complementarianism and Eschatology: Engaging Gordon Fee's "New Creation" Egalitarianism

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Introduction

The New Testament teaches that the redemptive work of Jesus Christ marks a pivotal transition in history because it finally addresses humanity's deepest problems. Christ's sacrifice atones for sin and propitiates God's wrath against sinners. His resurrection defeats the curse of death. His victory thwarts the schemes of the devil and accomplishes his Father's mission so that the kingdom of heaven might eventually become a full reality on the earth. Taken together then, these realities indicate that Old Testament promise has moved to new covenant fulfillment in inaugurated form. Now the present age simply commences on a divinely-set stopwatch ticking down the last days until the age to come arrives in its complete form, a day which is otherwise known as the Day of the Lord when the glorified Christ returns to save his people and judge his enemies.

Yet as the church awaits the fulfillment of these events, it would be an error to miss the implications that our eschatological hope has for the present time. Though the anticipation of the future does address how all things will be made new, this hope also goes to the very heart of New Testament ethics and the dynamics of church life in the present. The way things will one day be informs us on how we should conduct ourselves now. To think biblically then, one must learn to *think* and *live* with an eschatological orientation. But this being said, many questions still remain as to how this kind of theological mindset should be expressed in practical terms. This indeed is a complex question, especially when it pertains to gender issues.

Our interests about such topics as male headship, spousal roles, and Christian service are all intertwined not merely because they pertain to how God's people should co-exist relationally but, at a deeper level, they reflect our views of what it means to be a part of the new creation in Christ. This is why complementarian and egalitarian polemics are often engaged in terms of how male and female roles should be defined in light of the results of salvation. Egalitarians, for example, contend that all present categories of identity such as economic status, ethnic background, and gender have now been "Christified" under the new covenant so that they no longer have any relevance for defining the functional roles of believing men or women.[1] It is not that such categories no longer exist. Indeed they do and believers cannot escape them entirely. Nevertheless they are now passing away in lieu of a new kingdom that is presently amassing a citizenry of people who are all equal recipients of its inheritance. Hence all of the current networks that define function and status are now rendered ontologically irrelevant for Christians.[2] In contrast, complementarians argue that male headship is not a culturally arbitrary distinctive eradicated by the new covenant. It is not simply an expendable practice intrinsic to the present age. Rather it is embedded in the ordinances of creation itself and must be modeled by God's people so the world can behold the power of the age to come.[3]

Obviously the disagreement here is not minor. It is theologically significant for many reasons including the fact that it affects how we live out our faith both corporately as well as individually. That is why this essay intends to explore this impasse in more detail by addressing Gordon Fee's assessments of gender roles as they relate to the church's existence and ministry in the present age.[4] Our thesis is that Fee's egalitarian reading of Scripture falls prey to a form of "over-realized" eschatology. More specifically, *he exhibits a theological fallacy by arguing that certain functional structures within the home and the church are culturally arbitrary and/or functionally legalistic because they will eventually cease to exist once the eschatological future arrives. Contra Fee, we contend that the preservation of certain gender distinctives helps to reflect the Christian hope of a new heavens and new earth because they act as a bridge showing both how the original creation is delivered from the curse of sin and how God's kingdom transforms human relationships.* To support this, we will (1) summarize Fee's attempts to use the concept of new creation against complementarianism;[5] and (2) argue that his relativizing of male headship focuses upon the "not yet" aspects of eschatology, and thereby misrepresents how biblical writers believed new covenant living should be expressed prior to the inception of the final age.

Gordon Fee & New Creation Egalitarianism

At the outset we should acknowledge that Fee has established himself as a first-rate scholar and contributor to NT studies. He has produced helpful books at the popular level,[6] in-depth monographs on Pauline theology,[7] insightful texts on issues in hermeneutics,[8] and several technical commentaries including volumes on the Pastoral Epistles, Philippians, and 1 Corinthians, for which he is most well known.[9] His career has been so prolific that several of his academic peers contributed to an anthology in honor of his 65th birthday.[10] And in surveying the scope of his work, he clearly has offered substantial defenses of egalitarianism by providing thorough treatments of NT passages that explicitly pertain to women in ministry. However, an analysis of his polemics reveals that his denial of male headship is primarily based upon two arguments.[11] These include (1) his proposal that the NT relegates the value of gender roles to the futility of the present age; and (2) his related contention that the apostle Paul never recognized gender-based authorities in the church.

Clarifying Fee's Hermeneutical Approach

Fee rightly asserts at the outset that division among evangelicals on gender issues exists because of disagreements on how to interpret all the pertinent biblical texts. Fee believes thinkers on both sides of the debate have a commitment to biblical authority.[12] The underlying problem, however, is that there is no consensus for reconciling the theological tension between the supernatural and human elements of Scripture. The Bible is a combination of transcendence and temporality, the merging of divine messages with human words that are set within the plane of human history. Likewise, since it is ultimately inspired by one Author, it possesses an inherent canonical unity. The key issue is how these dynamics are to be balanced hermeneutically. Fee thinks it can only be done by embracing both human and divine authorship, and this is why he adopts the concept of the *analogia fidei*. Yet he only does so reservedly. He warns that this concept can often blind us to the meaning of a given biblical passage because

> sometimes a highly improbable interpretation can be superimposed on a text in order to make it conform to other texts for the sake of unity—which is often the result of a prior commitment to the shape of that unity as much as to the unity itself. Unity is often understood to mean uniformity. That Scripture might reveal a diverse witness on matters is summarily ruled out before one even looks at the texts.[13]

Now indeed this claim is true as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. We can all acknowledge that our zeal for doctrinal synthesis may inadvertently lead us to shortchange certain biblical passages. But we are still responsible to ascertain some kind of

criteria that can help us avoid this danger. And all the more so when it comes to dealing with how the NT addresses such a critical issue as gender.

Fee is well aware of this and that is why he argues complementarianism cannot be the solution. He deduces that theological commitment to male headship eliminates any potential for interpreting Scripture holistically. The reason for this is because its core ideas are based upon spurious cultural implications scattered throughout the NT as opposed to its more explicit thematic teachings.[14] Complementarians allow contrasting pieces of advice on gender roles to dictate how they understand much broader theological categories instead of vice versa. The net result is that sporadic ad hoc imperatives regarding men and women are converted into legalistic axioms requiring universal observance.[15] Consequently, Fee concludes that the practical outworking of this approach openly distorts the essence of NT teaching regarding the church as the community that supersedes all present-day social distinctions.

As an alternative to complementarianism, Fee proposes that there is no *explicit* NT teaching about male headship at all.[16] Rather biblical writers addressed specific, problematic scenarios and have left us with a wide variety of practices.[17] This leads to a perplexing question though. How should contemporary believers interpret and apply these texts today? Fee's initial response is that it is premature for complementarians to collect the random occasions of patriarchal advice and simply treat them as ethically normative. Instead, he believes a better guide for our twenty-first century reading of these texts is the NT emphasis on the Spirit-indwelt church as the current expression of the new creation.[18] The act whereby the Holy Spirit unifies Jews and Gentiles into the one people of God and makes them equal heirs of the kingdom of Christ is what brings symmetry to the NT. So when biblical writers make peripheral comments about gender roles, they are not laying down divinely-ordained instructions about how all human cultures are to function *ad infinitum*.[19] They are only discussing multiple ways of preserving the gospel witness within the given culture in which first century believers lived.[20] Paul, for example, never endorsed the patriarchal structures of his day but wisely gave instructions on how believers were to relate to a society that did. And now in God's providence the church can live out those principles without the shackles of patriarchy.

Tolerating Social Boundaries while Ignoring the Significance of Patriarchy

Fee enlists the Apostle Paul to support his egalitarian reading of the NT. This is in no way surprising since Pauline literature has always been a primary source for this exegetical debate. Typically, complementarians are quick to insist that his well known remarks about the adornment of women in corporate worship (1 Cor 11:2–16), qualifications for pastors (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), instruction on teaching authority in the church (1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:12–15), and comments on relationships between husbands and wives (Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19) are all clear referents to theological assumptions he had about male headship. Egalitarians respond to this perspective by appealing to Paul's teachings about the soteric equality of all believers (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13, 2 Cor 5:27) in order to counterbalance texts which appear to endorse certain role distinctions.[21] Fee employs this latter strategy by viewing Paul as a proponent of what might be described as a kind of Christified androgyny wherein the covenantal giving of the Spirit brings about a new corporate identity which transcends all present cultural categories including patriarchy.[22]

Fee defends this point in more detail by appealing to the entire epistle of Galatians, which he interprets as primarily being concerned with the theological significance of what it means to be a part of the people of God. The real motif is ecclesiology, not soteriology *per se*.[23] Fee claims this theme unfolds as Paul elaborates upon the implications of the Spirit making both Jew and Gentile one new creation in Christ. Specifically, this reality abrogates all previous means of covenant demarcation including circumcision, food laws, and Torah observance.[24] Now it is strictly pneumatological in nature because all believers are justified by faith and

equal recipients of the Spirit, thereby constituting one new race in Christ.

Fee then expands upon this idea by claiming that Paul alludes to it elsewhere in his writings in one of two ways.[25] First, he sees Paul's perception of his mission to the Gentiles as indicative of his belief that divisions of ethnicity and gender were rendered meaningless because they had been eradicated by the resurrection of Christ. The new order inaugurated by the cross links these prejudices with the fading present age.[26] Second, Fee highlights the "new exodus" language Paul occasionally adopts to describe the present significance of the resurrection (cf., Rom 6:1–14; Eph 4:20–24; Col 3:1–11). Herein, the Old Testament expectation for God to deliver His people from exile by redeeming the very earth itself (e.g., Isaiah 40–66) has now come to pass in preliminary form through the existence of the church. People are now able to experience a foretaste of the new creation in the present fallen world by becoming a part of the new covenant community. Moreover, Fee believes that these motifs of Gentile inclusion and Israel's deliverance illustrate Paul's belief that the church now exists to prove that redemption overcomes all of the social, personal, and cosmic obstacles that separate humanity from God and each other.[27]

Fee finally synthesizes this "Pauline ecclesiology" by offering several practical observations. One is that Paul's statement in Gal 3:28 is really a manifesto that completely reverses the idea of social roles in ways modern-western readers typically miss. To claim there is no longer Jew and Gentile, slave nor free, male or female "equally *disadvantages* all by equally *advantaging* all."[28] Whereas in the first century social significance was almost solely determined by one's position of authority or status, Fee argues that Paul's theology strikes at the heart of the most central ways in which this attitude was fostered in his day. He says that Jews have no priority over Gentiles as the people of God, masters have no ultimate authority over their slaves, and that males have no intrinsic authority over women, married or not.

This leads to another deduction: even though Paul negates the significance of these social barriers, he does tolerate their existence because the age to come has not arrived in its fullness. Hoping to preserve the testimony of the gospel, Paul on occasion instructs believers on how to conduct themselves within the cultural parameters in which they lived.[29] Yet Fee shrewdly qualifies that Paul only gives deference for the sake of proper piety. He never allows believers to exclude one another by enforcing these boundaries. For example, the Corinthians are all to eat together at the Lord's table, regardless of who is rich or poor (1 Cor 11:17–34); Philemon should accept Onesimus back not simply as a slave but as a brother as well (Philem 16); and husbands no longer have authority over their own bodies but are to be given to their wives and love them as Christ does (cf., 1 Cor 7:3–4; Eph 5:25).[30]

So coming back to Fee's original argument, his thesis is that Paul's understanding of the new creation defies a first-century male-oriented society because it is a part of the age that is rendered obsolete by the impending eschatological kingdom. Likewise, patriarchal structures are not even intrinsic to all modern-day societies. What this means then for Fee is that male headship is something inherently temporal, culturally arbitrary, and theologically subversive because it is a norm that is part of this world alone.[31] Consequently, if complementarianism is correct, then, theoretically, a Jew can demand a Gentile to be circumcised, a believing slave owner can demand that his servants remain as such even if they become Christians, and husbands can demand humble servitude from their wives.[32] Clearly Fee desires to avoid these abuses and thereby contends that we should see the church as the community of Spirit-indwelt saints who are equally gifted to serve each other, regardless of gender.[33]

Egalitarianism as Over-Realized Eschatology

There is no question that Fee's model of "new creation" egalitarianism demands a careful response. Not only are his interpretive deductions antithetical to male headship in any context, but his very approach to reading the writings of Paul (or all of the Bible for that matter) is theologically untenable. This being the case, we will address Fee's

proposals by highlighting three central concerns: (1) his misconstrued presentation of how Paul relates eschatological expectation to the present functions of both genders in the church; (2) his unacceptable way of interpreting our moral accountability to Paul's original commands regarding gender; and, finally, (3) the veneer of pragmatism that seems to be driving his endorsement of egalitarianism.

Neglecting the "Not Yet" of Eschatology

It is apparent that Fee's misuse of the new creation motif is based upon an interpretive error that was somewhat of a problem even in Paul's day. This fallacy, of which Fee is well aware because he has treated it numerous times in his studies on Pauline literature, entails the tendencies of Paul's hearers sometimes to overemphasize the present significance of certain theological realities. For instance, Paul taught that believers encounter some of the benefits of the new creation now. Believers are already glorified positionally (Rom 8:30), seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6–7), and raised with Christ to be in union with Him through their new Spirit-filled identity (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:18–20). At times, though, his readers misinterpret the existential significance of these facts in the present, which then leads some of them to deny other critical truths. On occasion some questioned the future resurrection (2 Tim 2:16–18), the church's need for ongoing discernment and spiritual giftedness (1 Cor 1:28–31; 4:8–13), and in one case, some believers inadvertently bordered on denying the resurrection of Christ himself (1 Cor 15:12–13). In each of these cases, Paul's strong emphasis upon the current manifestation of future eschatological blessings compelled some to conclude wrongfully that all of them were completely experienced in the present. As a result, they exchanged the redemptive necessity of deferred eschatology for the ontological extremes of realized eschatology. And it is this very mistake that Fee ironically repeats by arguing all gender roles are functionally dissolved since the new creation renders both believing males and females as equal heirs of the new covenant.

Now to make a proper qualification at this juncture, it is true that certain gender distinctions will one day transition into a different context via the culmination of Christ's kingdom. Male headship *as presently expressed* will indeed change when creation is redeemed. At that time glorified believers will not be given in marriage (Matt 22:29–30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:35–36) nor will the church only be an alien embassy on the earth since Christ's authority will be fully obeyed by all the nations (Rev 5:9–10; 21:3–4). Nonetheless, the fact that gender distinctives will indeed experience modifications at the eschaton does not mean they are necessarily nullified in the present. For Paul as well as the other New Testament writers, the means of currently expressing the freedom of the new creation is not to abandon gender roles or ignore their functional ramifications. Rather they are to be fleshed out in ways that reflect Christ-likeness and gospel-centered holiness. Husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church, wives submit to their husbands as the church follows Christ, and churches proclaim the gospel in ways that restore proper deference to the created order and male headship.

Also contra Fee in this regard, Paul does not deal with the matters of gender by simply tolerating cultural patriarchy. He does not instruct churches on how to live out their faith in the world with hopes that one day they will reach egalitarian maturity. If that were the case, he would be just as guilty of compromising the ideals of New Testament community as Peter was in Antioch (Gal 2:11–16). Peter acted one way around Gentile converts but when delegates of James from the church at Jerusalem arrived, he changed his behavior to show deference to Jewish believers and Paul rightly confronted him about this hypocrisy. Yet at the same time, if Paul was truly an egalitarian at heart as Fee argues, then it is a similar compromise for him to claim in certain passages that gender roles are irrelevant and then in other cases hold churches accountable to "patriarchal" mandates.

The reality is that Paul was unequivocal in the practical outworking of his theology of gender. His eschatological emphasis regarding equal access to covenantal blessings did not lead him to conclude all heirs had synonymous functions.[34] He

taught that in Christ, inheriting the kingdom of God is not based upon whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, a master or a freeman, a male or female. All those who have the Spirit are one in Christ. But this unity did not exclude male headship. It was only through the preservation of both salvific equality and functional complementarity that the church illustrated its hope for the future (i.e., *a balanced realized eschatology*). That is why, for Paul, the only way to make theological sense out of ideas like wives not submitting to husbands, husbands not sacrificially loving their wives, or churches not being led by men is to speak of Christ's return as already having transpired because only then will gender roles be redefined in a new eschatological context (i.e, *hence the need for deferred eschatology*).[35]

Living Out the New Creation in a Fallen World

A second concern also warranting attention is Fee's deduction that all forms of complementarity reflect the spiritual vanity of the present age. He defends this claim by adopting an argument advocated by many egalitarians. The argument goes like this: if complementarians are to be consistent hermeneutically, they must not only defend male headship in the contexts of the family and the church, but they should be equally concerned about defending the rights of masters to rule over their slaves.[36] But clearly this leaves complementarians in an unacceptable quandary, and so they should recognize *every* social category that establishes a hierarchy of value is spiritually irrelevant for God's people. This would include opposition to slavery as well as "patriarchy" in the home or the corporate life of the church.

To illustrate this approach, Fee attempts to highlight pertinent egalitarian principles supposedly found in the NT itself. One example is that, as far as the family goes, husbands and wives are brothers and sisters in Christ first, which eliminates any true authority one has over another since both may pray and prophesy in the church as well as serve as leaders.[37] Another is Fee's more emphatic assertion that Paul himself never sanctified any particular structure in the home or the church since it would contradict the liberty of the new covenant incurred by the gifting of the Spirit.[38] According to Fee, if the apostle wished to speak of roles that were to be filled by the people of God, the criteria for potential candidates would be whether the Spirit had equipped a mature disciple for such a capacity, not whether the believer was a man or a woman.

There are at least two problems with Fee's claims in this regard. One is the unwarranted assumption that we must interpret Paul as either fully endorsing or rejecting every social context that was a part of his culture. More to the point, it is equally unjustifiable for egalitarians to say Paul repudiated gender distinctions altogether and likewise to say that complementarians must embrace slavery in order to be hermeneutically consistent. The simple reason is that Paul's writings show that he saw some structures as essential and others as dispensable. For example, while the classic household texts do describe how husbands are to relate to wives, children to parents, and slaves to masters, Paul does not treat these topics in the same ways.

When Paul addresses slavery, he instructs believers on how to emulate a Christ-like spirit. We see this in his admonishment to Philemon as a slave owner to forgive and receive his former servant Onesimus back as a brother (Philem 16). Obviously this makes perfect sense because this is a virtue that is indicative of all believers regardless of whether they are slaves or masters. Likewise, in another setting Paul claims believing slaves have permission to obtain their freedom if the opportunity presents itself (1 Cor 7:21–22). For Paul then, choosing to become or remain a slave is optional for believers, but the proper conduct as a Christian slave is not. This means Fee is right to assert that Paul did not endorse slavery as a practice. He instructed believers on how to live in relation to it. What Fee refuses to acknowledge, however, is that Paul never claims that Greco-Roman slavery has its institutional roots in the theological fibers of creation or eschatological expectation. Only the family and the church are described as such (e.g., 1 Cor 11:7–9; Eph 5:31; 1 Tim 2:12–15) because marital and ecclesiological concerns have theological strings attached to them that slavery does not.

When it comes to marriage, for example,

Paul does not speak to husbands and wives in the same way he does to slaves or masters. He does not endorse a husband seeking freedom from his wife or vice versa in the same way that he advises Christian slaves to possibly obtain release (cf. 1 Cor 7:21, 27). Nor does he call a master the head of his slave as Christ is the head of the church, or command slaves to obey their masters as the church obeys Christ. But he clearly interprets the marriage relationship with such constructs. Husbands typify Christ by sacrificially loving their wives, and wives typify the church by following their husbands. And as they do so, the balance between leadership and trust not only highlights the original reciprocation that Adam and Eve forfeited, but it also points to the unending submission that the church will experience under Christ's headship (Eph 5:24–25). The eternal relationship that Christ will always have with his people is to be exemplified currently through the temporal relationship between husbands and wives. Furthermore, when Paul instructs single believers on the possibility of matrimony, he does not treat marriage structures as arbitrary. He simply sees the decision to marry as optional (1 Cor 7:25–26). Believers have the freedom to enter or avoid this binding covenant, but if they choose to do so, obedience to the proper roles is non-negotiable (1 Tim 5:14).

Related to this, another troubling argument requiring attention is Fee's emphasis upon Spirit giftedness as being the primary criteria for service in the church. We concede this observation is helpful insofar as it corrects unbiblical attitudes that many evangelicals have about ministry. Fee rightfully asserts that often Christian ministry becomes one-dimensional or politically top heavy because the clergy are perceived as the ministers while the members are ill-equipped spectators.[39] He also mentions that many men tend to think they are initially qualified for ministry simply by virtue of being male as opposed to having a certain level of spiritual ability.[40] Finally, Fee is justified in asserting that all men are not intrinsically more gifted or equipped for service than women.[41] Under the new covenant, both receive the Spirit and are empowered to be used by Him. What Fee misses is the same basic axiom that has always separated complementarians from egalitarians—the distinction between ability and authority. These reservations in and of themselves are legitimate, and complementarians would agree with each one of them. Nonetheless, they have nothing whatsoever to do with functional diversity and biblical male headship.

The NT gives no simple endorsement to any man or woman to serve the Lord in a particular fashion simply because they exhibit certain spirit-empowered abilities. It is certainly essential, but it is not sufficient. Believers are to exhibit various levels of spiritual maturity, integrity, and sometimes authorization from the church or leadership to fulfill certain tasks (e.g., 1 Cor 14:31–33; 1 Tim 3:1–2a). And contrary to Fee's attempts to resolve them, it is clear that Paul in certain texts restricts specific responsibilities to men. What seems to be the dilemma for Fee is he simply wants to remain ambivalent when it comes to delineating functional gender distinctions because there is no universal consensus on what all the relevant NT texts teach about the matter.[42] So his solution is to let the Spirit move and allow a kind of pneumatic church polity to take its course. The only dilemma is how to discern the "moving" of the Spirit in the church apart from how He has revealed His will in the boundaries of Scripture.

The Impracticality of Complementarianism

Finally our last area of concern is Fee's occasional resorting to cultural pragmatics as justification for his egalitarian views. This can be seen in his occasional charge that complementarian readings of the NT provoke a hermeneutical crisis because human cultures are always in flux. Fee's point is that when complementarians promote contextualized patriarchal insights to the rank of transcultural mandates, they eventually face an insurmountable problem. Male-dominant interpretations of the Bible are only accessible to cultures that are disposed to patriarchy.[43] Yet as we see in western culture today, "patriarchal" ideals are simply incompatible with how men and women relate to each other socially, economically, and, apparently for Fee, ecclesiologically.[44] Thus, complementar-

ians are caught on the horns of a dilemma. They must constantly backtrack and redefine the ideals of male headship in order to ensure some kind of continuity with what they believe the NT writers originally taught. And at the same time, they must strive to maintain relevancy with cultures that are moving further away from patriarchy every day. Fee deduces that this tension leaves complementarians in a quagmire of legalism because they are forced to analyze every conceivable situation in which women could possibly exercise authority over men and then judge them case by case to see if each one potentially violates male headship.[45]

Now at first glance, Fee's critique seems to have some merit. Many times complementarians do struggle to maintain their voice in evangelical guilds because they do not always have consensus on what male headship should look like in every possible scenario that a given family or church may face. But this does not mean the idea of gender distinctives is necessarily wrong. It means that theological fidelity and serious discipleship require us to diligently apply ourselves in understanding how biblical manhood and womanhood is to be lived out in whatever century we may find ourselves. Likewise, aside from this, egalitarians can justifiably be accused of a similar crime. What would egalitarians say about applying their views of gender to cultures that are still stringently patriarchal? Should egalitarian missionaries and church planters attempt to change the mindsets of those people and lead them away from all of their unenlightened paradigms regarding gender? Or should egalitarians adopt a distorted view of Paul's first-century "approach" and meet them where they are while hoping to put them on a trajectory where they might abandon patriarchy several generations down the road. One can become just as legalistic by demanding new believers in a patriarchal environment become egalitarian at the possible expense of losing their voice in their culture. Consequently, the accusation of legalism does not readily solve this debate for either side.

Even more disconcerting than this inconsistency, however, is the open capitulation Fee displays with his negative remarks about male headship. His caricature of complementarianism as being culturally meaningless reveals somewhat of a cavalier attitude that should elicit tremendous concerns for evangelicals because it casts doubt on how we as the church are to maintain our witness before the unbelieving world. Essentially, part of Fee's repudiation of male headship is based upon the deduction that it cannot be applied to modern-day life in western culture consistently.

The problem with this approach is that social accessibility is not the criterion for determining how we should exhibit our discipleship. There are many challenging beliefs in the Christian faith which are currently untenable to our post-modern intellectual climate, including the exclusivity of the gospel, the eternal judgment of the unrighteous, the concept of divine revelation, miracles in general, creation, and the list goes on and on. Should we forsake these as well because the church now exists in a cultural landscape that repudiates these beliefs? Obviously the answer is no. We do not surrender these theological convictions in order to rescue Christianity from cultural extinction. We maintain them as our doctrinal foundations so we can act as a contemporary voice in the wilderness sounding the truth to the world. The church's witness is clearest when it resists the current of the culture, not when it follows it. In the end then, Fee is guilty of the very crime that he accuses complementarians of committing. He scolds them for distorting the significance of the new creation, when, in reality, he has simply domesticated it in terms that are comfortable to the egalitarian ears of western individualism.

Conclusion

Upon final reflection, we must affirm that complementarianism does not compromise any NT teaching on how believers should presently relate to each other in light of the eschatological future. Scripture does not teach that the church should presently function as a redeemed androgyny because one day gender roles will enter a different context in the new heavens and new earth. Whatever our roles may be in the kingdom that is to come, we will still have unique roles to play, and

even though we will be like the angels because we will not be given in marriage, we will indeed retain our distinct essence as male and female creatures. Hence male headship in and of itself is not a part of the sin-cursed fallen age. Its extremes of abuse and neglect are the errors needing remedy. And, thankfully, the new creation provides the answer by reconciling believers with God as well as each other.

ENDNOTES

[1]For instance, cf., Rebecca Merrill Groothius, *Good News for Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 193; Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 204–06; Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 170–79; and Stanley Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 604.

[2]Note egalitarians differ as to whether the age to come *restores* or *transcends* the original created order. See a treatment of this issue in Richard Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 96–101.

[3]This is why complementarians argue that the concept of male headship is a part of the divine blueprint of creation itself rather than a post-fall contamination of the Edenic garden of egalitarianism. For succinct assessments of this point, cf. Raymond C. Orlund, Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 95–112; and W. Robert Godfrey, "Headship and the Bible," in *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship* (eds. David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 82–91. It is also because of this conviction that complementarians consider it seriously defective when some egalitarians reject the authenticity of how the Genesis-creation narrative unfolds. To question the veracity of the account is to put biblical authority in jeopardy; see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 35–42.

[4]Gordon Fee is professor emeritus of New Testament studies at Regent College.

[5]Fee has become a major contributor to egalitarianism having produced numerous essays including several which will be examined in this article. He currently serves on the Board of Reference for Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). Moreover it is to be acknowledged that *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (*JBMW*) has already provided responses to Fee. See the volume dealing with the egalitarian manifesto *Discovering Biblical Equality*; especially the articles by Robert Saucy, "Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26-29," *JBMW* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 29–37; and Andreas Köstenberger, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Basic Principles and Questions of Gender," *JBMW* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 88–97.

[6]Probably his most well known books for laypeople, new believers, and pastors are introductory texts that he has co-written with other authors including Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); and Gordon Fee and Mark Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

[7]His most pertinent contributions entail treatments on Paul's understanding of Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, and most recently Christology. Cf. Gordon Fee, "Gifts of the Spirit," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 339–47; idem, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994); idem, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996); and idem, *Pauline Christology* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007).

[8]See Gordon Fee, *God and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); Fee and Eldon Epp, *Studies in the Theory of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Gordon Fee, "History as Context for Interpretation," in *The Act of Bible Reading* (ed. Elmer Dyck; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 10–32; idem, *Listening to the Spirit of the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); idem, *To What End Exegesis?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and idem, *New Testament Exegesis* (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

[9]Gordon Fee, *I Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; 2d rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); idem, *Philippians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); idem, *I & II Timothy, Titus* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995); and idem, *Philippians* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999). Note also that he currently serves as the general editor for the New International Commentary on the New Testament.

[10]See Sven K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright, ed., *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[11]The primary works under consideration will include Gordon Fee, "Male and Female in the New Creation," in *Discovering Biblical Equality* (ed. Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 172–85; idem, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 241–54; and idem, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 364–81.

[12]Fee, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," 364–65. Note that this cannot be said of all egalitarians. Fee argues that Scripture actually affirms egalitarianism, whereas other egalitarians see biblical writers as being diluted by first century prejudices that are now unacceptable. Cf., Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco: Word, 1974); and Clarence Boomsma, *Male and Female, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). Consequently, we can distinguish between those who believe Scripture teaches their views and those who argue that Scripture must be reinterpreted to allow for their views.

[13]Fee, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," 370–71.

[14]Ibid., 371–72.

[15]Ibid., 373.

[16]Ibid., 374–75; idem, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," 247–48. Remarkably, Fee is even leery to affirm that the NT gives much definitive material for church government, to the point that he prefers using the term ecclesiology with reference to the subject of the people of God rather than concerns pertaining to functional structures, offices, and ministries. As an alternative, he cordially suggests that we possibly adopt the word "laiology" when discussing the general concerns of being the people of God. See Fee, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," 242, n. 3.

[17]Fee, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," 377; idem, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," 247–48.

[18]Fee, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," 380–81.

[19]Fee does acknowledge that human government is a special exception. See Fee, "Male and Female in the New Creation," 181.

[20]Fee, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," 377–79.

[21]Works that address the implications that Gal 3:28 has for the discussion of gender roles are too numerous to mention here. Yet one that succinctly highlights many of the hermeneutical and theological complexities of how Gal 3:28 fits into this debate is Hove, *Equality in Christ?*

[22]Fee concedes that we cannot ignore all differences between being male or female because the genders represent part of what it means to be created beings. Nonetheless, at the same time, because of the age to come, the intrinsic differences both matter and do not matter in terms of final eschatological reality. See Fee, "Male and Female in the New Creation," 177, n 11.

[23]Fee also acknowledges that justification by faith is a crucial factor in discussing this subject. However, it is only a subset of a larger concern in defining the new identity of Jew and Gentile in God's new Christological economy. See ibid., 174–75.

[24]Ibid., 175.

[25]Ibid., 177–79.

[26]Ibid., 178.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., 180 (emphasis in original).

[29]Ibid., 181.

[30]Ibid., 182–83.

[31]Ibid., 185.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Fee expands this last point in "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," 241–54.

[34]This is no small matter because it obviously goes against the very grain of Fee's polemics. For example, to imply that Paul truly prescribed complementarian ideals for any ecclesiological context is so foreign to Fee's approach that he is even willing to reject Paul's clear comments in 1 Cor 14:33–35 regarding male headship as it relates to the adjudication of tongues and prophecy in the corporate worship setting. Fee contends this segment of Paul's argument cannot be reconciled with his earlier allowance of women to pray or prophesy in the church (1 Cor 11:1–15). He believes the pericope in 14:33–35 is actually a spurious scribal insertion of some kind. Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 708; idem, *God's Empowering Presence*, 273–81; idem, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," 250–52. For responses to this textual issue, see D. A. Carson, "Silent in the Churches: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 141–45; Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corithians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1148–50; C. Niccum, "The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34–35," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 242–55; and Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 49–52.

[35]This is not to imply believers will not still exist as glorified-resurrected men and women. It only means that, as such, our relationships to one another will function with certain dynamics we simply cannot define in detail until the parousia.

[36]Fee, "Male and Female in the New Creation," 184. Fee asserts that if one justifies a given order in marriage, one must likewise maintain that God ordained slavery as well since Paul assumes both realities in the same Greco-Roman structure in his discussions of household codes (Eph 5:21–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1). See ibid., 184 n. 25.

[37]Fee even argues that in certain first century instances when a woman was the head of a household where a given congregation met, it is reasonable to assume that she had a measure of ecclesiastical authority as well. See Fee, "Male and Female in the New Creation," 184. However, this is historical conjecture without any explicit exegetical evidence.

[38]Ibid. Though we cannot address these matters here, Fee's dismissal of virtually any functional offices in the church is perplexing because one is left wondering whether there are any practices described in the early church that are normative for us today. Fee tries to solve this conundrum by proposing that the gospel of freedom and the gifting of the Spirit be our hermeneutical guides for determining what is prescriptive today. But this simply begs the question.

[39]Fee, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," 254.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., 252–53.

[43]Fee, "Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate," 379.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid., 380.