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The Limits of a Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: A Focused Response to T. R. Schreiner

Dr Webb's book on the hermeneutical principle of 'redemptive movement' is raising considerable debate. His present article aims to dispels what he sees as misunderstanding of his intention.

Key words: Bible; hermeneutics; women; slaves; ethics.

Introduction

Applying the Bible's redemptive-movement meaning[1] within our contemporary context raises the question of limits. Should one take the redemptive spirit within the slavery texts and the women texts beyond certain time-locked components of the NT? Does the redemptive movement, begun in the OT and extended in the NT, need to be extended even further beyond the NT? Or, should we

1 When it comes to applying the Bible, there are two basic approaches: (1) a *redemptive-movement* or *redemptive-spirit* appropriation of Scripture, which encourages movement beyond the original application of the text in the ancient world, or (2) a more *static* or *stationary* appropriation of Scripture. The latter understands the words of the text in isolation from their cultural context and with minimal – or no – emphasis on their underlying spirit, thus restricting contemporary application to how the words of the text were applied in their original setting. But to do so often leads to a *mis*appropriation of the text precisely because one has failed to apply the redemptive spirit of the text in a later cultural setting.
An understanding of redemptive-movement meaning is derived from the Bible through an examination of *foreign* movement (in relation to the ancient culture), *domestic* movement (in relation to existing traditions or social norms within the immediate covenant community), and *canonical* movement (across large epochs in salvation history, primarily from the Old Testament to the New). These three streams of "movement meaning" within Scripture itself provide the ultimate basis for contemporary application of the text that will often carry us beyond the bound-in-time components of meaning within the biblical text. For a further development of a redemptive-movement hermeneutic, see William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

expect the NT to express a totally realized ethic or a completely finalized expression of redemptive-movement meaning in all of its concrete particulars? How do we understand the NT as the final apex of revelation? These are good questions, deserving of sound theological and hermeneutical reflection.

Along with an attempt to answer these questions, I have written this article[2] in reply to Thomas R. Schreiner's critique of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic developed in my book, Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis.[3] In view of the need for selectivity, I will not reply to every aspect of Schreiner's critique. Rather, this article is a 'focused response' in the sense that it only seeks to counter Schreiner's central criticism, namely, that a redemptive-movement hermeneutic (herein, 'RM hermeneutic') does not rightly appreciate the NT as God's final and definitive revelation. Schreiner's central criticism raises our opening questions and expresses his own conviction about limiting the Christian use of a RM hermeneutic to the OT only; in his view a RM hermeneutic ought not to be applied to the NT. In reply to Schreiner, I will attempt to correct a fundamental misunderstanding of the issue as well as to argue the alternative thesis that indeed a RM hermeneutic ought to be applied to the NT.

The New Testament is God's final revelation

For Christians the NT is most assuredly our final expression of canonical revelation. I wholeheartedly concur with Thomas Schreiner's statement that the NT is the 'final and definitive revelation'[4] by which we address all issues of faith and practice. Since the NT is the final and definitive word that God has spoken to his people in the last days (Heb. 1:2), transmitted to the saints once and for all (Jude 3), we do not expect any further revelation until the coming of Jesus Christ.[5] As

2 This 'Focused Response to Schreiner's article is an expansion of *one section* within a chapter entitled, 'A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy' in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

3 Ibid. For the review article, see Thomas R. Schreiner, 'William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals:* A Review Article', *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6:1 (2002), 46-64; idem, 'Review of *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*', *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7:1 (2002), 41-71.

4 Schreiner makes this affirmation about the NT as the 'final and definitive revelation' numerous times in his critique of my work. See Schreiner, 'A Review Article', *SBJT* 6:1 (2002), 54, 55, 56, 63.

5 Ibid, 54.

with Schreiner I also think it is extremely important for Christians to hold that 'in the NT we have the final and definitive word that speaks to every practical issue'.[6] I raise this point since it brings to the surface what Schreiner considers to be the major weakness of a RM hermeneutic. However, the finality of the NT as the apex of revelation is not actually a point of disagreement between Schreiner and myself. It is obviously a point of misunderstanding, which needs to be rectified; but it hardly sustains a point of disagreement. I concur with Schreiner on this matter.

Herein lies the real issue – how does one relate the NT as final *revelation* with a *realization* of its social ethic? Unfortunately, some authors merge these two concepts into one affirmation, assuming that the NT revelation contains a fully realized ethic in all of its particulars. However, this is simply not the case. As God's final revelation, I would argue that the NT expresses an ultimate ethic in its underlying redemptive spirit (redemptive-movement meaning) but not in all of its concrete 'frozen in time' particulars. The NT is *unlike* the OT in the sense that it is further along in its development or realization of ethic – it takes the OT redemptive spirit further. Nevertheless, the NT is still *like* the OT in that it expresses the unfolding of an ethic at certain points in an incremental (not absolute) fashion. In reality the debate is over *the degree to which the NT is similar and/or dissimilar to the realization of ethic within and beyond the OT.* All agree that the NT is God's final and definitive revelation – again, that is not the debate. All agree that the NT moved aspects of the OT towards a greater realization of redemptive spirit and an improved ethic – that also is not really the issue. The debate is over whether in some fashion (obviously to a lesser degree than the OT) Christians need to move with the redemptive spirit of the NT towards a yet-further realization of the redemptive movement which goes beyond the whole of Scripture, including the concrete, frozen-in-time particulars of the NT.

It might be enlightening to discover that the issue does not divide neatly along hierarchical vs. egalitarian lines. There are actually four positions: (a) some hierarchalists would not want to apply a RM hermeneutic even to the OT unless explicitly prompted by the NT, (b) some hierarchalists like Schreiner are more open to reflect upon redemptive movement beyond the OT concrete specifics with or without the explicit approval of the NT, (c) some hierarchalists – a growing segment – are willing to take the redemptive movement beyond the concrete specifics of the NT towards a greater realization

6 Ibid, 54.

of social ethic and would be open to some kind of ultra-soft patriarchy,[7] and (d) egalitarians, much like the former category, generally carry the redemptive spirit beyond certain concrete specifics of the NT towards what they consider a greater realization of social ethic in an egalitarian expression. So hierarchalists are fragmented three ways on this issue! A delightful irony to this whole discussion is that those who hold positions (c) and (d) are much closer to one another hermeneutically, than either are to those who take views (b) and (a). A good number of hierarchalists have moved from position (b) to (c) as they have wrestled with implications from the slavery texts within the NT. But the slavery texts offer only one line of reasoning – I will introduce three strands of argumentation below.

Realization of redemptive-movement meaning

The distinction above – between NT *revelation* as final and the *realization* of redemptive movement as yet unfolding beyond certain concrete particulars within the NT – is important to understanding how hermeneutics fits into the gender debate. Egalitarians and ultra-soft patriarchalists are inclined to see that, like the OT (though to a lesser degree) one can go beyond various concrete particulars of the NT in a realization of social ethic. In other words, while the NT achieves a greater realization of redemptive movement than the OT, further realization of redemptive movement towards an ultimate ethic is still needed and should be passionately pursued by Christians. I will argue a three-fold rationale for seeing the NT as expressing an incremental or developing (not ultimate) ethic in certain concrete particulars: (1) the OT as precedent, (2) the NT slavery texts, and (3) the NT women texts.

The OT as precedent: continuity and discontinuity

In attempting to understand redemptive-movement meaning within the NT, one can certainly appeal to the OT as precedent. While the OT does not make a direct case with respect to the NT, it surely

7 Ultra-soft patriarchy utilizes a redemptive-movement approach and so applies a contemporary form of 'greater male honor' in keeping with a particular understanding of the original-creation texts. However, the concrete-specific realization of the movement meaning would be expressed through some alternative (much less heavy) forms of ritual/social honor such as, for example, retaining a husband's last name in the home and having a male as board chair or perhaps board secretary in the church (the alternatives are endless). While retaining some form of greater male honor, there is an increased openness to eliminating gender-based leadership restrictions in the home and church.

makes a persuasive indirect case. The OT precedent should inform appropriate expectations for the NT. Granted, the NT moves the OT ethic further along in its concrete expressions, as the OT itself moved (incrementally) in relation to its foreign and domestic context. However, something very important has stayed the same between the OT and the NT. Those who argue for the NT providing a fully realized ethic in all of its particulars have forgotten the very factors that produced a less-than-ultimate ethic in the first place within the OT. The OT was God's revelation to his covenant people within the constraints of a curse-laden and culturally shaped world. Yet, the NT is *still* revelation from God within a curse-laden and culturally distinct world. Both of these factors – the fallen world context and an ancient world horizon – create a ripe situation for impeding movement towards an ultimate ethic. If both of these time-and-space components are still part of the equation at the time of the NT (and they were), perhaps one should not be so quick to pronounce the movement within the NT as 'absolute' in all of its particulars rather than incremental like the OT.

The NT carries the redemptive spirit within the OT further *even* within many of its concrete, frozen-in-time instructions regarding the treatment of people. Based upon this *discontinuity* of further movement between Testaments one might expect something closer to an ultimate ethic in the NT. If this were the only factor impacting the question of redemptive movement, I would be inclined to agree with Schreiner. However, it is not the only consideration. The *continuity* between Testaments of a fallen world and an ancient-culture context surely favors expectations for finding an incrementally advanced, yet not fully realized, ethic in the NT. This 'real world' continuity between Testaments, while an indirect rationale, creates a strong case for the likelihood of finding an incremental ethic within the NT and thus the need for a RM hermeneutic.

The NT slavery texts: taking redemptive movement further

As a second line of evidence supporting an incremental ethic within the NT (and the need for a RM hermeneutic) I will raise the example of NT slavery. There is certainly movement within the NT slavery texts (beyond the OT) towards a betterment of the institution. The status of slaves is elevated within the NT community. Slaves even manage to reach theoretical/salvific equality 'in Christ' which likely had subtle ways of increasing their social status within the covenant community. The heart-warming epistle of Philemon describes the transformation of relationship between a runaway slave and his owner. There is a new sense of beloved Christian brotherhood that emerges.

But all of this, as wonderful as it is, does not amount to an abolitionist perspective in the NT. There is no overt call within the NT for the abolition of slavery. Slaves are still instructed to submit and obey. Christian masters are not called upon to do what they can to abolish slavery, only to improve the plight of the slave under their ownership. Try as we may, modern Christians simply 'cannot get there from here' with a stationary approach to meaning in the text. We are unable to argue cogently for a pro-active abolitionist position in today's world based upon a words-on-the-page understanding of the NT. An isolated, stationary understanding of Paul's words simply does not reveal an abolitionist perspective.

However, if we understand biblical meaning to include the *redemptive spirit* of the text, then that is quite a different matter. Now I can construct a well-reasoned argument that abolitionism best aligns as a logical outgrowth of the spirit of the NT (along with the OT!) and its movement meaning. With a RM hermeneutic I can argue that abolitionism should be a passionate Christian value wherever slavery occurs in our modern world. If slavery were to arise again in our North American or European context today (God forbid!), Christians should have an ethical obligation based upon the spirit of Scripture (a) *to abolish slavery* rather than simply (b) *to treat slaves well but allow slavery.* A static, words-on-the-page understanding of social ethics in the Bible leads to the second option (b); a redemptive spirit and movement understanding of social ethics in the Bible leads to the first option (a).

While the NT is our final and definitive *revelation* and it contains an absolute ethic in its underlying redemptive spirit, the *realization* of its redemptive movement is incremental (like the OT) and not a fully realized ethic. The abolition of slavery, a clearly better ethic than simply calling for a nicer form of slavery, can only be achieved through reading and applying Scripture with a RM hermeneutic. In dialogue with those who think otherwise, I often challenge them to show me a NT text that calls for the abolition of slavery. Sorry, it just is not there. Unless one harnesses the redemptive spirit of Scripture there is no biblically based rationale for championing an abolitionist perspective. No, I am not at all talking about simply 'permitting' such a pro-abolitionist change in society should it happen![8] This is a clas-

8 Hierarchalists will sometimes say that it is okay to accept abolitionism because abolitionism is not condemned by the Bible. But, here they fail to see the point that their ethic is terribly anemic for it disregards the redemptive-movement in Scripture and fails to express *any* ultimate ethic within the pages of the NT, our final revelation. Alternatively, within a RM hermeneutic the slavery texts express an ultimate ethic in their underlying redemptive spirit.

sic confusion of categories. Such is not an abolitionist ethic. Rather, I am talking about a passionate commitment based upon the redemptive spirit of the Bible for ridding society of slavery. If there truly is a better treatment of human beings beyond the confines of slavery, then one must apply a RM hermeneutic to the NT and its incremental ethic in order to move to a better way of treating human beings. An isolated-words or stationary approach to the NT simply will not take us there.

The NT women texts: taking redemptive movement further

A third argument for understanding an incremental (not fully realized) ethic within the NT is derived from the women texts themselves. There is a need with the NT texts about women for embracing further redemptive movement beyond certain concrete and bound-in-time aspects of these texts. I will develop a sample set of seven examples within the NT women texts where there exists a good hermeneutical basis for taking the redemptive movement already within the OT and NT further in its realization. The *first three examples* are reasonably straightforward and, for the most part, they have been conceded by virtue of church practice as non-prescriptive texts at least on the level of their concrete, detailed formulation of a woman's obligations in the home and church. These first three examples I will discuss rather briefly. The *next four examples* will require a somewhat more extensive development due to a hermeneutical discussion that needs to accompany them.

1. Veiled women

It is broadly conceded within the contemporary church that the NT instructions for veiling reflect a cultural component within the biblical text.[9] Most hierarchalists willingly accept a movement away from the concrete, on-the-page specifics of the text here and accept some kind of attitudinal alternative. What they perhaps do not realize, and a trip to certain parts of the Islamic world would readily confirm, is that such an applicational move to this more abstracted level carries the broader redemptive movement well beyond the NT setting. This applicational change, subtle though it may be, significantly reduces the expression of patriarchy and increases a less-restrictive and freeing treatment of women. Such an applicational move, however, is wonderfully consistent with the underlying spirit of the Bible.

2. Silenced women

Aside from being veiled, the NT also instructs women to be silent and

9 1 Cor. 11:2-16.

not to raise questions within congregational gatherings.[10] Should they have any questions, they are to ask their husbands at home. In short, women are to be silent and the text assumes a gender perspective where the male/husband is the repository of biblical knowledge. The church has largely abandoned the concrete form of these instructions and for good reason. Over the years women as a sociological group (compared to the ancient world) have greatly increased in their knowledge and educational status. In our contemporary world many times the questions raised by women exceed the insight and knowledge level of questions raised by men. So some kind of gender-based restrictions on questions in church becomes an applicational problem. Furthermore, when a woman gets home, she need not ask her husband for his insight on some passage or issue. She can simply consult a commentary, for instance, written by a biblical studies expert such as Margaret E. Thrall, whose detailed and careful exegesis of the text often far outpaces many male scholars in the field.[11] While providing certain transcultural underlying principles, this 'be silent and ask your husband at home' text is generally no longer applied today in terms of its concrete gender-restrictive particulars.

3. Calling one's husband 'master/lord'

The NT also instructs wives to follow Sarah's example and, by inference from her example, to call their husbands 'lord' or 'master'.[12] For a wife to address her husband as 'lord' invokes the same title attributed by slaves to their masters. Now this happens (smile) in our home on rare occasions when my wife Marilyn says to me 'Oh my lord, Bill.' But, these words, when they do occur, are invariably followed by the question, 'What have you done?' At that point, I have to explain how I managed to disfigure the bumper of our car or some other act of folly. It is then that I realize my wife was simply lamenting to God (large 'L' – her true Lord) and not really addressing me as 'lord' after all.

Let us be honest. Contemporary hierarchalists do not follow this clear and unambiguous teaching of the NT any more than egalitarians do in their homes. Whether knowingly or not, they have moved in their application to a far softer expression of patriarchy than what is found in the concrete configuration of the NT text. But this is a

10 1 Cor. 14:34-35.

11 As a sampling, one can reference Thrall's exceptional work on 2 Corinthians: Margaret E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

12 1 Pet. 3:6.

good thing for it carries further the underlying spirit of both Testaments in moving towards an elevated status and treatment of women and a corresponding reduction in patriarchal power. Unwittingly the Christian community has applied movement meaning within the OT and NT women texts as a whole by taking this underlying 'lighten up' or 'ease up' spirit to a yet further realization within the contemporary application of certain concrete and particularized points.

In some respects the preceding three examples – veiling, silencing, and calling one's husband 'lord/master' – are a 'given' in our real-life world. Practice says as much about one's hermeneutic as does theory. However, the next four examples will push the theory discussion a little further. I will engage certain hermeneutical tools – tools of cultural/transcultural assessment – and begin using them alongside a redemptive-movement approach. These tools augment a RM hermeneutic. In essence these tools give us clues for spotting certain features of the biblical text where redemptive movement can and should be taken further.

4. Submit and obey

The NT instructs women to 'submit to' and 'obey' their husbands.[13] Some Christian interpreters water down this language in an attempt to make it more palatable today. It is sometimes difficult to tell if they are making a statement about the lexicography of ancient terms or about modern application. While recasting ancient lexical terms within an historical document is hardly honest, I would suggest that we do need to consciously change our contemporary application. We need to move with the Bible's redemptive spirit and reduce the weight of patriarchy beyond what is found in these prescriptive injunctions. Our contemporary application should not endorse a patriarchy that is weighted as heavily as this unilateral 'submit to' and 'obey' language.[14]

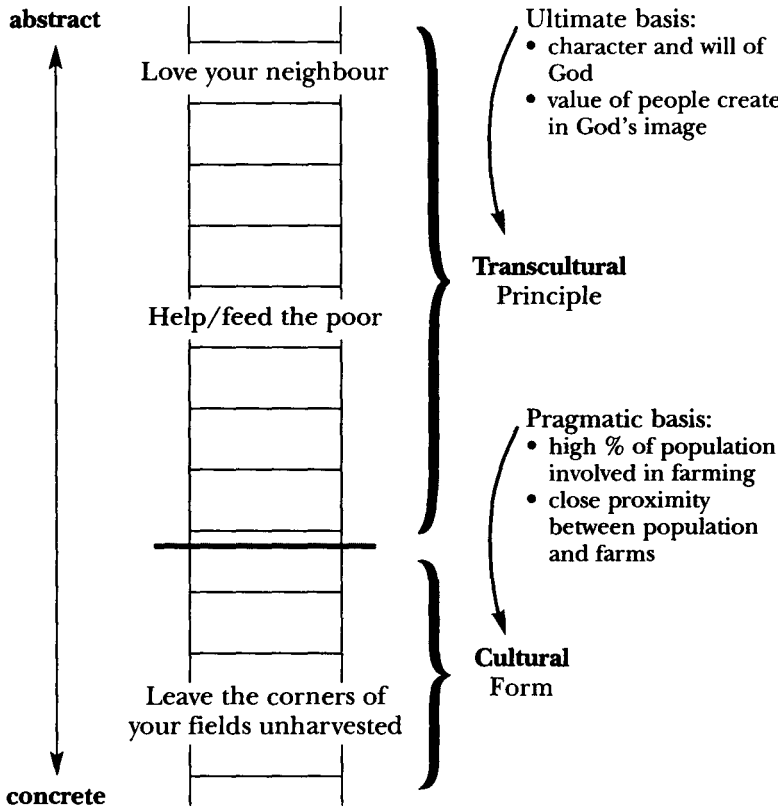
Aside from the redemptive spirit within the biblical women texts, which is headed in a less restrictive direction, the decision to lighten up or ease up on the degree of patriarchy in the 'submit' and 'obey' language (if not all the way to an egalitarian mutual-deference marriage) is informed by the process of cultural/transcultural analysis. Two of the tools we will use might be called respectively 'pragmatics between two cultures' and 'the ladder of abstraction'. The text of Leviticus 19:10, 'Do not reap the very edges/corners of your field',

13 Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1, 6.

14 The term 'submission' in a mutual sense (not unilateral sense) would be fine if one were arguing for complete equality with mutual submission or mutual deference.

offers a good neutral illustration of how pragmatic factors help us discover where the line is between cultural and transcultural components. It also shows how pragmatic factors generally impact the lower end of the ladder of abstraction:

Ladder of Abstraction



Non-moral pragmatic factors tend to shape the most concrete 'on the page' expression or form of a biblical command. Pragmatic factors often surface the rationale for the 'down the ladder' components of a biblical command; whereas the ultimate rationale generally provides the basis for 'up the ladder' components of a biblical command. The pragmatic factors related to the original setting of the command of Lv. 19:10 are at least two-fold: the high percentage of the original population involved in farming and the close proximity between the population base and the farms.

These two pragmatic factors were part of the original setting but they are *not* part of the agricultural and social configuration of our modern world. In our contemporary setting, the percentage of the population in cities is much greater and the farms are sometimes hundreds of miles removed from the people. If modern farmers were to leave the corners/edges of their fields unharvested, the grain would simply rot. Thus the pragmatic basis of the Leviticus text is lost in our setting. When moving between two cultures, the lack of sustained pragmatics serves as a clue to cultural components within the biblical text. When the 'bottom drops out' of the pragmatic basis between two cultures, the Christian interpreter should be prepared to move up the ladder of abstraction to discover what is transcultural in this biblical command.

Now we return to the NT instructions for wives to 'obey' and 'submit to' their husbands. There are several reasons why these commands made sense in the original culture, namely, differentials in marital ages (the female often was significantly younger), differences in amount of formal education, differences in opportunities to acquire and hold resources, the lack of informational sources within the home, the lack of social exposure, etc.[15] These non-moral pragmatic factors created an automatic and somewhat heavy hierarchy whether or not the Bible said anything about it. Yet such culture-based pragmatics that were true of the ancient world are no longer part of our contemporary world. Without these pragmatics we must be willing to move up the ladder of abstraction. When the 'bottom falls out' of the pragmatics between two worlds, interpreters must be willing to rethink their contemporary application.

So one must ask, what should a contemporary Christian marriage look like if we move 'up the ladder' of abstraction? Well, perhaps we should move to a mutual-deference or mutual-honor (egalitarian) model with broad equality between husband and wife but deference in decision making based upon expertise in a particular area. Or, possibly we should move 'up the ladder' away from the heavy submit and obey language to equality and mutuality in decision making between husband and wife while retaining some expression of greater male honor in the relationship (ultra-soft patriarchy), maybe by the wife taking her husband's last name. At this point I do not want to quibble between these two options. My central point is that a redemptive-movement approach and cultural/transcultural assessment tools converge in a way that helps contemporary Christians determine how we should shape application of NT texts within our setting.

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15 For a fuller discussion, see Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, 213-216.

5. Women as more easily deceived

The traditional interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:14 throughout church history has been (up until recently) that women are more easily deceived than men. For a variety of reasons this traditional rendering in my view remains the most convincing interpretive option.[16] However, this interpretation raises a problem since social-scientific research shows that women *today* are not more gullible or deceivable than men.[17] The seeming conflict is resolvable since the same research confirms that a grouping of cultural factors makes one person more deceivable than another person. These cultural factors, not inherently connected to gender, made women more easily deceived than men in Paul's day. Consequently, we need to move up the ladder of abstraction and apply the underlying principle of 2:14 to both genders today: do not appoint as leaders/teachers people who are easily deceived. Along this traditional line of interpretation, 1 Tim. 2:14 is almost certainly a cultural-component text. Given this perspective, what is most important to our redemptive-movement discussion is how this finding impacts contemporary application. Here is the impact in brief: without the gender-specific weightiness of 2:14 it is very difficult to reach the concrete application of 2:11-12. Something needs to give a little or soften in the prohibitions of 2:11-12 if the basis for the prohibitions has changed. At the very least, this cultural/transcultural analysis suggests we ought to lighten up on the concrete expression of hierarchy within this passage.

6. Old wives' tales

Within the same epistle where Paul, according to long-standing interpretive tradition, says women are more easily deceived than men (1 Tim. 2:14), we discover yet another pejorative or 'not so pretty' comment about women. In 1 Tim. 4:7 Paul instructs Timothy to 'have nothing to do with godless myths and *old wives' tales*' (NIV). In the NASV the same instruction reads with no less difficulty, 'have nothing to do with worldly fables *fit only for old women*'. Obviously we have

16 The traditional rendering of 1 Tim. 2:14 is based upon its straightforward connection with the concrete restrictions placed upon women (2:11-12), namely, not wanting gullible/easily-deceived people teaching, the frequent analogy-type usage of OT tradition by NT writers (not strict grammatical-historical exegesis), the broader problem of deceived women within the Pastorals, and the unwavering consistency of reading the text in this manner throughout church history. One should also note that the traditional interpretation of 2:14 is consistent with the culture-component view of women that Paul conveys in his cryptic statement about 'old wives' tales' (1 Tim. 4:7). See the next example.

17 See Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, 221-235, 263-268.

a problem here since this is not exactly a complimentary comment about women (let alone about older women). I am not willing to side with radical feminists who would dismiss the text as 'sexist'. Instead, I would argue, given more space, that there was a *cultural* component of truth within Paul's statement, namely, the gender aspect of his comment. Many women in ancient cultures lived in a 'small world' of social exposure that often ranged not much further beyond the home than to the well and the marketplace. The world of older women was even smaller. So in this 'small world' social context (along with other considerations[18]) ancient women were far more vulnerable to myths and fables than was the case with men. Therefore, Paul's 'old wives' tales' saying has a *cultural* component of validity within the ancient context (even with its hyperbolic form). So to label Paul's words as 'sexist' is highly anachronistic. It assumes our own time-displaced perspective and world.

Nevertheless, I would hardly encourage contemporary Christians to use Paul's 'old wives' tales' saying today as a valid way of speaking about women. Given our different world where women have numerous 'in home' informational resources (phones, newspapers, books, magazines, TVs, movies, radio, the internet, etc.), where women have often been trained in formal education to think critically, and where women's social paths and public-discourse participation is as unrestricted as that of men, it would be utterly foolish to maintain a completely transcultural perspective on 1 Tim. 4:7. Also, given our kinder and gentler sensibilities today about labeling certain people groups with statements that would not be true of all within the group (we are a little harder on this sort of hyperbole today than was the case even half a century ago), there does appear to be room for greater redemptive movement beyond the concrete particulars of the text. I would want to affirm the transcultural aspect within 1 Tim. 4:7, namely, that all people – regardless of age or sex – should not be caught up in silly fables and myths. This text certainly has a wonderful component of transcultural relevance but not in its gender-based particulars. Surely the winds of redemptive-spirit meaning within Scripture need to carry us further in thinking through a better treatment and depiction of women than is represented in this 'frozen in time' particular of the NT text.

7. Procreative contributions of women

Our seventh NT example is drawn from Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 11:12b about man coming 'through woman'. Since I have developed

18 See the deception issue above.

this 'through woman' discussion at length elsewhere,[19] I will limit my comments here. Two hermeneutical tools augment a redemptive-movement approach in understanding this verse, namely, 'ancient vs. contemporary horizons' and the strengthening of Paul's point through 'scientific evidence'. Both of these tools help an interpreter distinguish between cultural and transcultural components within Paul's argument. Scientific research has changed human knowledge about embryology no less dramatically than the Copernican revolution. In short, we now know definitively that male offspring not only come 'through woman' (carrying and sustaining their male offspring) but also 'from/out of woman' (a substantive/genetic contribution). Ironically, in the case of male offspring (Paul's point in 11:12b) the genetic contribution of the mother actually exceeds that of the father.[20] Paul was not wrong in his minimalist-contribution argument about man coming 'through woman' in 11:12b.[21] There is no error in what he has said. Modern embryology simply strengthens (rather than diminishes) the point already within the biblical text.

Nevertheless, in our modern world we must *extend the weighting* of 11:12b beyond its contextual weighting in our contemporary application as we attempt to reason through issues of social honor and gender today. Serious hermeneutical reflection on Paul's counterbalancing[22] pro-creation argument suggests that we should give much greater weight to 11:12b in forging our contemporary application of gender relationships than was ever possible in Paul's day.

These seven examples from the NT women texts – veiling, silencing, addressing husbands as 'lord/master', submitting and obeying, deception assumptions, old wives' tales, and procreative contributions – ought to provide us with sufficient fertile ground within which a redemptive-movement understanding can work. The story here is

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19 Hopefully this essay on ancient embryology and contemporary horizons will be accessible soon in journal form: 'Balancing Paul's Original-Creation and Pro-Creation Arguments: 1 Corinthians 11:11–12 in Light of Modern Embryology.' It will eventually be included as a chapter within William J. Webb, *Tough Texts: Loving Biblical Authority Without Losing Your Mind* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

20 The mother's X-chromosome input provides a far greater amount of genetic information and is far more crucial to survival of the offspring than the father's Y-chromosome input.

21 For a development of ancient embryology and the evidence for understanding Paul's 'through woman' phrase in 11:12b as a minimalist-contribution argument, see the forthcoming article (noted above).

22 The strengthened or extended meaning from modern embryology supplements a counterbalancing argument *already within the biblical text* – an argument that weighs social honor implications derived from pro-creation insights in a manner that offsets certain original-creation insights.

one of seeing the Bible's redemptive spirit taken further beyond certain concrete, frozen-in-time aspects of the biblical text (even the NT text) in establishing a contemporary application of male-female relationships.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to discuss the limits of a RM hermeneutic in light of the central criticism advanced by T. R. Schreiner that a RM hermeneutic fails to understand the NT as God's final and definitive revelation. Along with identifying common ground between Schreiner and myself (dispelling confusion about the real issue in the debate), hopefully this article has made a persuasive case for the following points:

- We must make an important distinction between the NT as final *revelation* and the *realization* of redemptive spirit in ethic.
- There are three significant pieces of evidence that support an incremental (not absolute) ethic within the NT and thus commend the use of a RM hermeneutic within the NT: (1) *OT precedent* combined with continuity factors of a cursed and a culturally defined world should impact our social ethic expectations for the NT; (2) the *NT slavery texts* do not provide us with an ultimate social ethic in their concrete particulars, nor can one get to an abolitionist position based upon a static 'on the page' understanding of the words in these texts; and (3) the *NT women texts* show us, in seven brief examples with varied elaboration on practice and theory, how we should permit the Bible's redemptive spirit to carry us beyond certain 'on the page' components of the NT's depiction and treatment of women.
- The Bible's underlying spirit and its redemptive-movement meaning is very much a part of what Christians need to ponder within their contemporary applications of the NT text.

Abstract

Should one take the redemptive spirit within the slavery texts and the women texts beyond certain time-locked components of the NT? Does the redemptive movement, begun in the OT and extended in the NT, need to be extended even further beyond the NT? Or, should we expect the NT to express a totally realized ethic or a completely finalized expression of redemptive-movement meaning in all of its concrete particulars? Thomas R. Schreiner's critique of the book, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural*

Analysis levels a central criticism against a redemptive-movement hermeneutic (RM hermeneutic), namely, that it fails to rightly appreciate the NT as God's final and definitive revelation. Schreiner's central criticism expresses his conviction about limiting the Christian use of a RM hermeneutic to the OT only; a RM hermeneutic ought not to be applied to the NT. In reply to Schreiner, this article attempts to correct a fundamental misunderstanding in the debate as well as to argue the alternative thesis that indeed a RM hermeneutic ought to be applied to the NT.