

Moving Toward Mutual Understanding

GLENWOOD CHURCH OF CHRIST

John Mark Hicks—January 8, 2017

I. A Continuum of Understanding

- A. *Traditionalism* asserts a “strong” principle of “male headship” (or, male spiritual leadership) and interprets this to mean that women are excluded from any voice in the assembly (e.g., women cannot make announcements, verbally request prayers, ask questions, voice a prayer, or testify about an answered prayer in the assembly) or leadership function in the church (e.g., women cannot chair committees on which men sit, teach in any setting where men are present, cannot vote in “men’s business meetings,” etc.).
- B. *Complementarianism* asserts a “soft” principle of “male headship” (or, male spiritual leadership) in terms of role and function, and it maintains that many traditional practices are oppressive and deny women the freedom God permits and encourages. This group is open to more significant and visible participation by women in church life and the assembly since not all leadership is a “headship” function.
- C. *Egalitarianism* asserts the full equality of role relationships and functions within the leadership and ministry of the church. This position opens *all* functions in the church/assembly to women according to their giftedness though this is advocated with cultural sensitivity and deference to local customs or traditions.

II. Moving Toward Reading Scripture Together

- A. *Should we read the biblical texts as timeless and normative statements to every situation and culture must conform?* Every statement in Scripture is absolute and is never relative or dependent upon the circumstances, situations, or occasion in which it is written. Thus, every application contained in Scripture should be reproduced in our situation.

- B. *Should we read the biblical texts as containing the principles to be applied though those applications may vary from culture to culture? We read Scripture to discern the theological principle. Today we apply the principle rather than duplicating the application. The same principle may yield different applications given different circumstances (both in the past and the present).*
- C. *Should we understand that Scripture even points us beyond its own circumstances through “seed” texts, paradigm shifts in the story, and the original vision for creation fulfilled in new creation? Consequently, while slavery was accommodated in the biblical text, we understand that the gospel contains the seeds for the abolition of slavery. This approach suggests God calls us to live in the future Scripture imagines.*

Small Group Discussion

1. How do you see these same three positions [*traditionalism, complementarianism, and egalitarianism*] mirrored in various cultures throughout the world? For example, in some cultures, “Traditionalism” is still practiced in society. How has this changed in US culture over the years?
2. Given these three positions, how has this changed in “church” cultures in the last few centuries or even decades?
3. What do you regard as the key point—whether biblical text, cultural situation, or theological idea—in each of these positions?
4. In what ways are you able to appreciate each position? State how you may complement each position and value something in each?
5. One goal is “mutual understanding,” that is, we understand why each holds the position they do and we can appreciate the reasons why they do. How is that working for you?