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The Redemptive Movement

In Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan

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Introduction

Let me tell you why I am here. I've been asked to come and deal with the issue of the roles of women in Christian leadership. And I'm going to do that. But I want you to understand—that's not the real issue. The real issue is the sufficiency of Scripture.

What is being taught here is part of what's known as the Redemptive Movement or sometimes called the Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic. And that doctrine is what is behind these changes. It's not simply a discussion over a few passages on gender roles. It's about the sufficiency of the Bible as the only rule and authority over your life.

One of the basic tenets of the Reformation was the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Martin Luther called it *solo scriptura*—the Bible alone. Thousands of people have died over the centuries because they refused to give up that foundation. Men like Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Jan Hus, John Wycliff and untold missionaries.

Please understand—This movement has given up this foundation. Don't be deceived. Whatever we sow, that's what we'll also reap. Once you've given up this foundation, you no longer have that Rock to stand on. You are on your own when it comes to making moral, ethical, and theological decisions—or you're at the mercy of whoever you are following. Once you give up the sufficiency of Scripture, your beliefs are no longer based on the Rock of the Word of God but on the sand of human opinion and human culture.

I want you to understand that's where this movement is going. So be real sure you want to go there.

What About the Roles of Men and Women

Let's go on to read some passages.

In 1 Peter 3:1, the Apostle Peter wrote, *In the same way, you wives be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the Word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives. Peter's example is, just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right ...* (verse 6). What do you think? Is Peter giving us a temporary suggestion to be changed when the culture changed? Well, his example is Sarah, who lived 2000 years before Peter, yet Peter says she is the example for his day. It doesn't sound to me like Peter believed Sarah's example was just a notch forward on the cultural spectrum.

Let's look at Paul's commands in chronological order. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, he wrote, *But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Later he said, for the man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed, man was not created for the woman's sake but the woman for the man's sake* (verses 8-9). The Greek word used here for *head* is *kephale*.

New Testament scholar Wayne Gruden researched 2,336 instances of the word *kephale* in all the major writings of the classical and Hellenistic Greek periods, and found no clear instances of *kephale* meaning "source." He says the two pieces of ancient literature cited by feminists (Herodotus 4:91 and Orphic Fragments 21a) predate the New Testament by 400 years—and are not convincing. Moreover, "all the major lexicons that specialize in

the New Testament period give the meaning “authority over,” whereas none give the meaning “source.” [Ron Rhodes, “Feminism, The Debate over Feminist Theology— Which View is Biblical?” *Christian Research Journal*, 1991, p. 20]

In Ephesians 5:21-24, Paul wrote, ... *and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church. He Himself (being) the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives (ought to be) to their own husbands in everything.* So what do you think Paul meant? I suggest you don't need to know Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic or know anything about the Jewish or Hellenistic culture or rabbinical teaching to get the very clear point. If you believe the church is in submission to Christ, then you should believe that wives are to be in submission to their husbands.

The feminists try to confuse us here by saying, *be subject to one another* (verse 21) means mutual submission. But mutual submission is a contradiction in terms. Submission is, by definition, one way. According to “Webster's New College Dictionary,” submission means *yielding* or *surrendering*. The Greek word *hupostasso* means *to subordinate, obey, be under, obedience (obedient), put under, subdue onto, be subject unto, submit self onto.*

After saying, *Be subject to one another*, Paul explained exactly what he meant, if we simply read the context instead of reading our prejudices into the passage. When Paul said *be subject to one another* he meant the church to Christ (5:23), wives to husbands (5:22-24), children to parents (6:1-4), and slaves to masters (6:5-8). At no time does he suggest submission is mutual. If that were the case, Christ would also be in submission to the church, parents would be in submission to their children, and masters to their slaves. But what Paul describes is an equality in Christ with role differences, and those differences include submission to someone: masters, parents, husbands, and Christ.

About 4 years later, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to instruct the church on various issues. Part of that instruction included, *But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created and then Eve, and it was not Adam who was deceived but the woman, being deceived, fell into transgression* (1 Timothy 2:12-14). Here Paul made a clear case against women teaching or exercising authority over men. You don't need to be an expert in the Greek language or culture to figure out what Paul meant. Not only is it clear, it is clearly not because of anything going on in the culture. Paul said the reason women should not teach or exercise authority over men goes back to the Garden of Eden. He said it's because of the order of creation. So the Redemptive Movement's attempt to re-establish the Garden of Eden does not help their cause. Paul here said the Garden of Eden, not the current culture, is the reason for the restriction.

A few verses later, in 1 Timothy 3:1-2, Paul said, *It is a trustworthy statement ... if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer must be the husband of one wife.* I don't think you need any training in Greek or Hellenistic culture to understand Paul to say an elder must be a husband of a wife, not a wife of a husband. Or you could translate it a *one-woman man*, but not a one-man woman.

To Titus Paul wrote, *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife ...* (Titus 1:5-6). Here Paul wrote to a different messenger (Titus), in a different place (Crete), a different culture (Cretians), with a different situation (*Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons*) (verse 12), yet this qualification for an elder stays the same, *the husband of one wife* or a *one-woman man* never the wife of one husband or a one-man woman.

Jesus and the Role of Women

Egalitarian feminists emphasize Jesus' inclusion of women in His ministry as equal to men. But that is simply not the issue. Any serious Bible reader sees the equality of men and women being taught by Jesus and the apostles. The question they need to answer is not one of equality but one of roles. Did Jesus

assign women the same roles as men? **One thing is conspicuously absent in Jesus' ministry—women apostles.**

Some make the case that women sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His teaching, so they must have been His disciples. Well, of course they were. Believers are called disciples all through the New Testament. No one (I hope) denies that women were disciples of Jesus. But they were not apostles. No women were one of the 12. They had a different role.

In Acts 1, after the ascension of Christ and before the Day of Pentecost, when the apostles appointed a replacement for Judas, Peter said they should choose a replacement *from among the men* and the word is *andron*, for males. So Peter understood that apostles were to be males.

Women in Christian Leadership

The Bible has many examples of women serving or ministering (same word). They served, taught, gave advice, and corrected those who were in error. But what they never did was assume a position of elder, teacher, or authority over men. Let's consider a few examples.

Deborah was both a judge and a prophetess (Judges 4:5). Apparently she judged disputes and gave advice to men. But when it came to a battle where someone would lead men, she called Barak to lead it and objected when he wanted her to go along (verses 6-8). When it was finished, she wrote a song about it, where she complimented the leaders who led (5:1), but described herself as a "mother in Israel." So she counseled men, advised men, corrected men, and wrote something men also read. But she refused to be in a position of authority over a group of men.

In Acts 9, we are introduced to a woman named Tabitha. It says, *This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did* (verse 36). Here is a woman of great impact in the early church, a leader and minister to many. But she didn't define leadership as a position of authority or teacher or exercising authority over men.

In Romans 16, Paul introduced the church in Rome to a woman named Phoebe. He described her as a *helper of many and of myself as well*. She may have been the one to whom Paul entrusted with the task of delivering this epistle to the Romans. But she is not referred to as an elder or in any positions of authority over men. Nor does Paul suggest she should become that kind of authority figure.

In 1 Timothy 3:11, we read *women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips but temperate ...* Some understand the word *women* to mean wives, others take it as a separate office of service. Either way, it is women serving in a way which does not include being elders, teachers of men, or in positions of authority.

In Acts 18, we encounter a couple called Priscilla and Aquilla. Priscilla was never mentioned as serving apart from her husband. She served with her husband. They ministered together with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), and Ephesus (Acts 18:18). They also had a church in their home in both Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:19) and Rome (Romans 16:3-5). In Acts 18:24-26 Priscilla and Aquilla ran into a Jew named Apollos who was speaking eloquently but lacked something. Verse 26 reads, *and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately*. Apparently, Priscilla was involved with her husband when they *explained the way of God more accurately*. This was done *aside* from any public gathering. So here we have a godly woman, involved in serving, hospitality, spiritual leadership, and counsel, even the counsel of a man, together with her husband. But her impact had nothing to do with seeking a role of elder or teacher in the sense of exercising authority over men.

What about Slavery

In the book which coined the phrase "Redemptive Movement hermeneutic," William Webb makes slavery his major proof for obliterating the role differences for men and women. The statement made in Mars Hill Church was, "If you are against slavery, then you already ascribe to what we call "Redemptive Movement." The argument says

the Bible is not against slavery. So if you believe slavery is wrong, you must disagree with the Bible or join their theological-hermeneutic camp.

There are several obvious problems with this argument. First of all, the slavery we are thinking about today, when we condemn it, is black slavery. Black slaves were kidnapped. Black slavery was immoral because it was based on kidnapping people, transporting them under horrible conditions, then putting them to forced labor. And the Bible clearly condemns kidnapping in both Testaments—specifically Deuteronomy 24:7 and 1 Timothy 1:10. So it's illegitimate for them to imply you accept their theology if you are against what we know as slavery.

But there is a big difference between the Bible not condemning slavery and the Bible commanding women not to have authority over men. One is a non-command, and the other is a command. The Bible never commands anyone to be a slave. Paul seems to say it's better not to be one, if you have a choice. But the important thing is to live for God in the manner in which you were called. Let's read 1 Corinthians 7:20-24. *Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman, likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*

Now I'm sorry if you don't like it that God didn't condemn slavery, but you're not God and you are not always going to like what God says. For example, when God took away Job's children, his fortune, and his health, Job wanted to know "Why?" At the end of the book of Job, God came to Job and essentially told him all Job needs to know is, "***I'm God, and you're not.***"

I'm sorry if you don't like it that God didn't condemn slavery. But that's just the way it is. There's lots of things in the Bible I don't like—But I'm not God. And I don't want to stand before Christ and tell Him I didn't keep His Word because I didn't like it. Do you?

Another issue which has been brought up is,

Why don't we greet one another with a holy kiss?

One of the recent sessions here began with the teacher asking why no one gave him a holy kiss and why the men did not raise their hands while praying. His answer, of course, was that these were all commands only for the culture of that day, whereas today we understand God has moved culture on to a "higher ethic."

But the real answer is as simple as it always is. The answer comes from the context. Of course there are personal things an author says to the people he is writing to which aren't for us. But they are personal, not cultural. That is, they are for that person or group, not a cultural command.

The way to know if something is personal or for the whole church is the answer to the question—**Does the author make a theological or moral case for it?**

For example, in 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul told Timothy, ... *remain on at Ephesus*. Does that mean we should all go and remain at Ephesus? Of course not. Why not? Because he said it to Timothy. In the Bible, we are always reading somebody else's mail. Paul made no theological case for everybody remaining on at Ephesus. And contextually, it is obviously only for Timothy.

How about *diligently help Zenas the lawyer* in Titus 3:13. Am I supposed to find some lawyer named Zenas and help him? Is this a cultural command? Of course not. Paul is not saying everybody in that culture should go and help Zenas the lawyer. From the context we can easily see it's a personal note.

The same is true for *greet one another with a holy kiss* (in 1 Corinthians 16:20; Romans 16:16; and 1 Thessalonians 5:26). One of the places it occurs is Romans 16:16. The verse before it reads, *greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister...* Am I supposed to find people like that? I'm afraid they are all dead. Is this a cultural command? Of course not. It's a personal note. That's obvious from the context. These are all part of Paul's closing comments and personalized greetings.

Obviously, kissing was a normal greeting in that culture as it is today in Russia and in many places in the East. I've been kissed on either cheek by fuzzy beards many times in my travels in Russia. But Paul makes no theological or moral case for it. He simply mentions it, obviously to encourage a warm greeting.

Now concerning Paul's statement, *I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension*, in 1 Timothy 2:8, the case Paul made here is for holiness, not for raising hands. Prayer throughout both Testaments is done sitting, standing, kneeling, laying prostrate on the ground, and by raising hands. Raising hands in prayer is a good practice, but the Scripture gives others as well. The point, however, is holiness in prayer.

But when we come to women being in submission to men and women not teaching or exercising authority over men, the authors went to great lengths to make a case for it. Paul went back to the creation order, related it to the eternal submission of God the Son to God the Father, and then concluded with comments like, it's *because of the angels* and *But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God* (1 Corinthians 11:10 and 16).

The Redemptive Movement and the Roles of Men and Women

From the very beginning, Satan has attacked the Word of God. When God said, *From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die*, Satan responded, *Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?* (Genesis 3:1, emphasis mine), and *you shall surely not die* (verse 4). God the Father said of Jesus, *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. So when Satan tempted Christ, he began by saying, *If you are the Son of God ...* (Matthew 4:3, emphasis mine). Satan's attack on the Word of God comes generally not from denying it but by using it, changing it, and perverting it in subtle ways. The end result is the same—namely, to deny what it commands.

The Old Testament prophets, Christ, and the apostles all sternly warned against following false prophets and false teachers, all of whom deny the clear commands of the Word of God. They do it, not by ignoring the commands, but by diluting them and perverting them, with the bottom line effect being we don't have to follow them.

Now let's define this movement a bit more specifically.

Defining the Redemptive Movement

The Redemptive Movement is really the Redemptive Movement hermeneutic. Hermeneutics is the study of principles of interpretation. So it's a new way to interpret the Bible. The term was coined by a man named William J. Webb, Professor of New Testament at Heritage Theological Seminary in Ontario, Canada. In 2001, he published a book called *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals—Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. This concept has been endorsed by several egalitarian feminists such as Gilbert Bilezekian, a co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. He promoted this hermeneutic in an article entitled, *Biblical Community Versus Gender-Based Hierarchy* (published by Priscilla Papers, 2002).

Now let's review more closely the three basic ideas of the Redemptive Movement:

- (1) They say that the way we should live is depicted in the Garden of Eden. Specifically, we should not follow the Genesis 3:16 command, *Yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you*, but we should pursue the conditions in the Garden of Eden, where they suppose (incorrectly, as I will show) that the roles of men and women were the same.
- (2) They teach the idea that God is working by an advancing culture to an "ultimate ethic." In the Old Testament, He advanced the culture from a primitive state to that of the Mosaic Law. In the gospels, Christ raised the standard to a higher ethic, and in the epistles the apostles upped it a bit more. But today, we live in a culture which God has developed far beyond the Bible. So commands like *... I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man...* (1 Timothy 2:12) are just what God taught then (under specific unique cultural

circumstances). This would not be true for today because God has redeemed the culture to a higher level.

- (3) The Redemptive Movement says that culture (the original culture) is essential for understanding the Bible. So, as an individual, you are incapable of understanding the Bible deeply unless you know Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and the ancient Rabbinical and Hellenistic cultures which surrounded those texts.

To demonstrate that this is what is being taught at Mars Hill Church, I will quote from a transcript of a message taught here on April 15, 2003.

So we say we're a Bible church and we obey the Bible. But we obey something bigger and deeper than the Bible because we don't really mean a literal obedience to the Scripture ...

So understand—he is telling us the Scripture is not sufficient. He says, “We don't really mean a literal obedience to the Scripture” because “we obey something bigger and deeper than the Bible.” So he is clearly, forcefully, blatantly denying the sufficiency of Scripture.

About the treatment of a captured woman slave in Deuteronomy 21, he goes on to say,

The Bible exists along a continuum ... When God enters into culture, God enters in and just moves the culture to the next click. ... So Paul comes in and ... moves it one click. Just takes it the next step.

... Is there a point at which quoting the text becomes maybe even destructive because the real issue is what is the redemptive movement behind that text. And is it possible that we haven't reached our goal with that text. ... The Bible, when it ends, doesn't end with God's ideal ... If you read those texts without asking what is the redemptive movement behind the text, you could end up quoting the Bible and actually be working against God's redemptive purposes.

So understand—he is saying the Bible is not sufficient. It's necessary. It's inspired. It's God's Word. It's valuable. But it's not sufficient. So because the Bible is not sufficient, it might be wrong—because it might be just bringing the culture along one more click.

So let's deal with the question—

Is there truth outside of the Bible?

It's been said that “there is truth outside the Bible, and all truth is God's truth, so we should also live by that truth.” Well, of course there is truth outside the Bible. I drive a pick-up truck to work every day. That's truth outside the Bible. I live by that truth every day. But the leadership of the Redemptive Movement uses this to try to convince us that truth outside the Bible can be contrary or contradictory to truth in the Bible.

For example, the Bible never says I should drive my truck to work every day, but it also never says I should not drive my truck to work or that it is sinful or wrong to drive my truck to work. The Bible makes no case against my driving my truck. If the Bible said people should not drive trucks, and I drove my truck anyway, that would be sinful.

The Bible does say a woman should not teach or exercise authority over a man, she should be in submission to her own husband as Sarah was to Abraham, and elders are to be husbands. So if I conclude from something outside of the Bible that women can teach or exercise authority over a man, a wife does not need to be in submission to her husband, or that elders do not need to be husbands, that's sin. The thing outside the Bible, from which I am making those conclusions, is not true.

Of course there is truth outside the Bible, but it's not contradictory to what is in the Bible. If it is, it's not true.

Often I say, "I'm determined to know nothing more than the Bible knows." What I mean by that is, anything contrary to the Bible is sin. I mean that I know of no other Rock upon which to base my moral, ethical, and theological thoughts. I mean that the Bible is sufficient. It's not only necessary and inspired and inerrant, it's also sufficient. I don't use Aristotle, what's taught at secular Jewish universities, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, sacred traditions, or cultural movements to determine what's right and wrong. If the Bible doesn't condemn it, neither do I. If the Bible does condemn it, so do I.

So understand, it's not my idea that the roles of men and women are different. I just work here. If you don't like it, take it up with God. But if you read the Bible, I suggest you will get the same answer Job did—something like, "Who is God around here? You or Me?"

Should we live like they did before the Fall?

Let's not overlook the obvious. We are not in the Garden of Eden. We are living out the reality of the curse. Men still have to work hard to survive, women still have pain in childbirth, and we all still return to the dust from which Adam came. And part of the curse God stated for the woman in Genesis 3:16 was *yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*. Nowhere in the Bible does God command us to go back and pretend or attempt to live as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. God gave new commands several times in the history of His revelation, but He never suggested it would be better if they ignore their present commands. Nor did He say, "It would be better if you went back to the Garden of Eden for your model."

But let's do that anyway, for a moment. Let's ask the question, "Were there role distinctions between men and women in the Garden of Eden?" It seems there were. Adam was created first (Genesis 2:7), man was given the task of naming the animals (2:19), the woman was created as a *helper suitable for the man*, not the other way around (2:20). God's instructions on moral responsibility were given to the man (2:16-17). After the Fall, God summoned the man (3:9). God began His sentencing with the man (3:17). After the Fall, God only referred to it as the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12).

When we look to the New Testament for perspective, we find that the submission of the woman to the man is based on creation. Part of Paul's case for saying "the man is the head of the woman" is *For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake* (1 Corinthians 11:8-9). His point can only be that submission is based on the order in creation, in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

Paul also wrote, *But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man* (1 Timothy 2:12). Then he gave his reasons for that statement. The first reason he gave is, *For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve* (2:13). So it seems at least one reason women should not teach or exercise authority over men is because of the order of creation in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

Now I want to move on to the second, and most basic, point of the Redemptive Movement—

Should we understand the Bible as only one ancient step along the cultural path toward an ultimate ethic?

The statement recently made at Mars Hill Church about this was, "The Bible exists along ... some sort of continuum, and we are now farther along. So when God enters into culture, God enters in and just moves the culture to the next click." Specifically, concerning the Apostle Paul, it was said, "He moves it one click. Just takes it the next step."

Now before we look at their specific arguments, let's consider a few implications of this doctrine. Any time the New Testament gives a command for the church which we don't like, for whatever reason, we can simply say that's where God "just moves the culture to the next click." Today, it's women elders, but why not homosexual elders, for example? There has never been a time in history until now when homosexuality has been accepted by the general public. Never before has it been politically incorrect to criticize homosexuality. Today, you are condemned if you do not call it legitimate. Of course, in the Bible, God clearly condemned it (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10). But,

hey, maybe He was just bringing the culture a click forward. If our culture is our guide, maybe God is telling us to tolerate it.

And, by the way, I thought Satan was the one influencing the culture. It's Satan who is the prince of the power of the air, the one who works in the hearts of the disobedient. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul referred to Satan as *the god of this world who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light*. The culture is under those unbelievers. The body of Christ, the church, is to be counter-culture and stand for godliness in a worldly culture going the other way. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18-20, *For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"*

William Webb, in his book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* (referenced earlier), claimed that the case for homosexuals is different because of the severity by which God condemned it. Well, I suggest he re-read 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 14:34-35. These sound far more severe to me than the lists of sins that include homosexuality.

Why not change the morality of the church to accept any other perversion the culture deteriorates into? We can simply declare any sin to be what God is doing now as He moves the culture along to an "ultimate ethic."

For example, why not declare the biblical condemnation of idolatry to be just moving the culture to the next click? There seems to be fewer verses condemning it in the New Testament than in the Old, so why not declare it's okay today because God now believes in tolerance as evidenced by the society. It's already going on. Muslims who become Christians are told they can call God "Allah" and worship in their mosque. Christians are practicing eastern mysticism. New Age mediators, for example, say something like, "You Christians can chant "Jesus" as your mantra. Say, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus ..." and when you breathe in the universal life force, say, "Jesus," and when you breathe it out, say "Christ," thus establishing oneness with the God-life-force of the cosmos." So why not have those idolatrous practices in our churches? Well, if we want them, all we have to do is say the scriptural prohibitions against them were just God moving the culture along one click.

What about abortion and euthanasia? The culture is now murdering an unborn infant every 20 seconds. The highest infant murder rate in all of history. So maybe God's statements about the sanctity of human life were just clicks on the cultural pendulum.

The effort in Mars Hill Church is to change the church constitution to include women elders. But that's just today's changes. In a letter to the members, dated May 15, 2003, a team pastor wrote this.

The leadership of Mars Hill is committed to God's truth as best we can understand it. That truth can appear in and out of Scripture. ...

Is this the last change to the constitution or will there be others? As stated above, the constitution is a legal document that is designed to give structure to the 501(c)(3) corporation. As we grow in our understanding of what it means to be community, the leadership may not feel the wording accurately reflects what we believe. If that should occur, the members will be asked to approve those changes.

So this is a fluid constitution. It may continue to change. Once again, we see that when we deny the sufficiency of Scripture, we step off the Rock of the Word of God and onto the continually changing sands of culture.

Do we need to know the original culture?

Martin Luther said, “A plowboy with a Bible knows more than the pope.” Why would Luther think that a German-speaking plowboy, who is characteristically uneducated, possessing only a German translation of the Bible (which was probably translated from a Latin translation of the Bible), could know more about God than the pope?

The answer is because the pope had a theological system, developed from what he considered “sacred tradition” which he imposed on the Bible. For the pope, the Bible was necessary but not sufficient. The pope believed God was working through the on-going unfolding culture of Roman Catholic sacred tradition. The result of this was to take the knowledge of the Word of God out of the hands of the “laity” because they couldn’t understand it by themselves. The laity was dependent on the clergy, and the result was that the people followed the priests but were themselves ignorant of God’s Word.

The plowboy, by contrast, could read God’s Word for himself. He didn’t know one bit of Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. He knew nothing about rabbinical tradition or Hellenistic culture. But he didn’t need them. He had a Bible, and that was enough. He could read the Word of God in his own language, study the context of each passage (as he leaned on his plow) and understand the heart of God.

The Great Commission Jesus gave the apostles was to *make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19) and to *be My witnesses ... to the remotest part of the earth* (Acts 1:8). How is that possible if the people in the remotest parts of the earth don’t have an “expert” in ancient Hebrew culture or rabbinical traditions, and they don’t know Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic?

The answer is, because missionaries would translate the Bible for them, and that translation would accurately teach them about God. Missionaries like William Carey, Wycliff Bible Translators, and the New Tribes Mission have been translating the Bible into thousands of languages and dialects of various people groups in the remotest parts of the earth for years. And guess what? People become believers and mature in Christ, and they know more than the pope, or our Protestant popes who try to impress us with their knowledge.

One aspect of my work involves teaching pastors of newly-formed churches in Northern India. These men have no formal education at all. They can read and write their own language, and they have a Bible printed in their own language. That’s it. Teaching these men is a real joy because they already understand their Bible accurately—even complex theological issues they have no problem with.

I’ve taught for the last 20 years in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Russia. I’ve taught people who usually have had no formal training. They are just as capable as I am because they have the same Bible I do.

But isn’t all truth communicated through culture? Aren’t languages themselves works of the culture? Yes, of course. Learning culture is an essential part of learning. But, like the plowboy, we can get all the culture we need reading the biblical author’s text itself—if we read it in its context. Generally speaking, the meaning of any word in question can be clarified by the other words around it—the context. That also includes understanding the culture. But all we need to know is the culture revealed in the Bible, through its own authors’ understanding in their own context.

Of course, knowledge of the original languages and culture can be helpful. It can give us insight and illustrations about the truth of the text. Just be sure you first understand the meaning of a passage in its context according to the stated intention of the author. Don’t impose something on it in order to understand it, or, worse, to change the obvious meaning of the text.

For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 reads, *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* I’ve heard it said that we must first understand that the emperor of Rome gave significant gifts to Thessalonica and then came to visit them to see how they used his gift. So the “Lord” is the emperor descending on the city with shouts and trumpets. Well, any person with a Bible translated into any

language who reads 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 will conclude this is a statement of the Christ coming for His church. This emperor thing is impossible to determine from the text.

Another example is the conclusion that the apostles were teenagers. If all you had is a Bible, you would conclude that the apostles were adult men with adult jobs and with homes, wives, families, and situated as mature, responsible citizens of their communities. This new idea would say Levi was a teenager who had the responsible job of a tax gatherer for the Roman government. I believe this view says the Apostle John was actually about 10 years old. So we are to believe that, at the cross, Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to a 10-year-old boy. We are to believe teenagers preached at the temple in Jerusalem, baptized 3000 people, and became the elders of the church, appointing deacons, leading and teaching the body of Christ.

Nobody I know of, all through history, ever believed that. All of the pictures of the apostles painted throughout history that I have seen show them as adult men, often with gray beards. Not that those pictures are inspired, but the point is, nobody understood the apostles to be teenagers.

So why this view? Because if you ignore the cultural information offered in the New Testament and impose on it secular rabbinical traditions, you will say, "Well, the rabbis taught children. Jesus was a rabbi, so Jesus taught children."

But Jesus was not a rabbi in any technical sense. He was called rabbi as a general word for "teacher," not as a position in the synagogue—as the Apostle John explained in John 1:38. Jesus is also called "teacher" with the word *didaskalos*, another general word for teacher.

The reality is, we learn from the authors of the Gospels that the formal leadership didn't know how to label Jesus. Their questions was, ... *show us Your authority* (John 2:18, see also John 1:19 and Matthew 12:38). The Pharisees said, "He's not one of us." The Sadducees, insisted, "He's not one of us." The rabbis, elders, chief priests, and scribes did the same. The whole point of their objection to Him was that He was a loose cannon. He's not part of any of our groups, so how do we control Him? Actually, the only person Jesus identified with was the weirdest guy in Judea—whom the authorities also hated because they couldn't control Him—John the Baptist.

The point is, don't come up with some way to deny the meaning of the Word of God, derived from its own context. When you say the culture I've learned from secular historical sources determine the meaning of the Bible, you make three false and dangerous assumptions:

- (1) The authors of the Bible are incapable of expressing their own meaning
- (2) The readers of the Bible are incapable of understanding what they read
- (3) Uninspired errant secular sources, traditions, and opinions must govern the meaning of the inerrant inspired Word of God

That sort of thinking reverses the Reformation, refutes the possibility of missionary work carrying out the Great Commission, and denies the clear intent of the authors of Scripture when they say things like:

I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts (Psalm 119:100)

This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth ... be careful to do all that is written in it (Joshua 1:8)

You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him (Deuteronomy 13:4)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)

Conclusion

In conclusion, I'd like to say this.

I've come here tonight with a heavy heart. I've come here out of love and concern for you and a desire to obey God and His Word. I hope you understand that I see this as a bus full of sincere people whose drivers are heading it for a cliff. Possibly they don't know that or realize that. Perhaps they think there is a new and better road out there. But it's a cliff which leads to destruction.

Please understand that those teaching a Redemptive Movement hermeneutic (as they call it) do not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture. They believe that the Bible is important, inerrant, significant, and the Word of God—as far as it goes. They will teach from it, preach from it, and tell you to read it and study it. But they will also tell you it is not sufficient. As has been said here, “We obey something bigger and deeper than the Bible because we don't really mean a literal obedience to the Bible ... The Bible exists along a continuum ...” So they believe that the Bible is simply God entering into culture to move it along one more click.

On one of the tapes I listened to, a man asked a question that broke my heart. He said he had been a Christian for—I think it was 8 years. He said he read his Bible, took it at face value, and it changed his life. But now he is confused. So his question was something like, “Can I just study the Bible if I don't know Greek or Hebrew or the ancient cultures?”

The answer he got was something like, “Yes, sure, of course you can. We're just saying that if you really want to get deep into the text, you need to know the original languages and the culture.”

I felt so sorry for this man—I wanted to scream, “No! Just the opposite is true. The path you were on will lead you deeper and deeper into the heart of God. I've seen it happen over and over with godly men and women all over the world.”

If you abandon the clear, plain, ordinary understanding of the Word of God for some cultural one imposed on it from the ideas developed by non-Christian Jews in a secular university, or think you have to change the clear meaning because of what somebody (who knows more Greek or Hebrew) says, you'll get further from the heart of God.

Brothers and sisters, you are in a battle for the Bible. The Redemptive Movement leaders will sound good because they use the Bible. But they deny the sufficiency of the Bible.

I came here tonight to tell you that it's not just a slippery slope, it's a cliff—and when you drive over it, you no longer have the Rock of the sufficiency of the Word of God to rest on.

Please thoughtfully and prayerfully ask yourself—Is that where I want to go?

Thank You