

GENDER STUDIES IN REVIEW

A Review of Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012. 224 pp. \$24.99.

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Benjamin Reaoch, pastor of Three Rivers Grace Church (SBC) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has offered a thorough and compelling response to the redemptive-movement (or trajectory) hermeneutic endorsed by egalitarian scholars such as Krister Stendahl, R. T. France, Richard Longenecker, David Thomas, I. Howard Marshall, and especially Kevin Giles and William Webb. This work is a revision of his doctoral dissertation completed at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary under Thomas R. Schreiner. Reaoch's thesis is that the "significant differences between the New Testament instructions to slaves and to women seriously undermine the conclusions made by the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. The fact that the New Testament 'points beyond' the institution of slavery does not indicate that it likewise points beyond God's design for gender roles" (xix). In the end, the crucial distinction between the issues of slavery and women's role within marriage is that "no biblical writer advocates for slavery based on the order of creation" (xix).

Reaoch's approach includes a combination of an exegetical study with a hermeneutical analysis. Chapter 1 provides a description of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic, including the key scholars (those mentioned above) who advocate this hermeneutic. In its essence, the redemptive-movement hermeneutic insists that the New Testament sets a trajectory of ethics but does not necessarily give us the best or final ethic. It is only by following that trajectory that we arrive at the ethic the New Testament would have given us if it was not bound

or limited by cultural concerns. Chapters 2 and 3 offer an exegetical study of key passages that pertain to slaves (chapter 2: Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:9–10; and 1 Pet 2:18–25) and to women (chapter 3: Eph 5:22–23; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:9–15; 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:33b–35; 1 Pet 3:1–7; and Titus 2:3–5). Chapter 4 represents a synthesis of the exegetical study of the two previous chapters. Reaoch maintains that the issues of slavery and women's roles are not to be equated because, unlike the institution of marriage, the New Testament does not endorse or commend slavery (though neither does it explicitly condemn it). Rather, the basis or ground for slaves to obey their masters "is the reminder of God's reward for well-doing" (79). In addition, he notes that reference to creation is absent in every slavery passage. In contrast, there are repeated quotations or allusions in many of the passages that refer to women's roles (e.g., 1 Tim 2:13; 1 Cor 11:8–9; Eph 5:31; and possibly 1 Cor 14:34). Thus, unlike marriage (and the roles within marriage), slavery is not a God-ordained institution.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the hermeneutical portion of the book. In these two chapters Reaoch dissects eight (of the eighteen) criteria developed by William Webb in his book *Slaves, Wives, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). In chapter 4 he examines (1) theological analogy, (2) preliminary movement, (3) seed ideas, and (4) purpose/intent statements, and in chapter 5 he analyses (5) basis in original creation, (6) pri-

mogeniture, (7) specific instructions versus general principles, and (8) the relationship between creation and redemption.

In order to illustrate Reaoch's work, we will examine his critique of Webb's criteria of *basis in original creation*. Webb maintains that although many doctrines that are rooted in creation are transcultural (e.g., divorce) or mildly transcultural (e.g., polygamy), some obviously have a significant cultural component (e.g., the Sabbath), and as such do not need to be upheld today. In response to Webb's analysis, Reaoch argues that polygamy was "a practice that was tolerated but never condoned, just as in the case of divorce" (116). Concerning the Sabbath, Reaoch notes that Webb's reasoning for our neglect of Sabbath observance is based mainly on culture. Thus, we have an example of a command that is based on creation that no longer applies to us (at least in the same way), opening the door that the prohibition of women teaching men likewise may be limited because of our cultural differences. Reaoch observes, however, that the main reason we don't observe the Sabbath as the Old Testament requires is not because we no longer live in an agrarian setting (i.e., a different culture), but because of the development in salvation history (i.e., a different covenant). It is therefore "overly simplistic, and thus misleading, to say that the pattern of Sabbath rest in the creation account is cultural. A more nuanced understanding of the issue would affirm that salvation history is by far the most significant factor in determining how to apply this creation pattern to our lives today" (117–18).

In order to bolster his point that some practices in the Bible are not transcultural but still grounded in creation, Webb also includes procreation, farming, ground transportation (i.e., walking), and vegetarian diet. But in each of these practices, Reaoch exposes significant holes in Webb's reasoning. For example, the command for Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" is not necessarily at odds with all forms of birth control (and therefore merely cultural) because we "should not read this as an absolute mandate for all individuals to bear as many children as possible" (118). Consequently,

"Webb has assumed unlikely and hermeneutically simplistic interpretations of the creation account in an attempt to heighten the perceived tension between original creation and today's culture" (119). Furthermore, since it is clear from Scripture that farming, ground transportation, and vegetarianism were never intended to be transcultural, Webb's inclusion of them "make it appear that he is grasping for ways to minimize the weight of the creation account" (120). Reaoch's conclusion, then, is that significant instructions that are grounded in creation are intended to be followed in every age and in every culture. Because gender and role distinctions are rooted in creation, and slavery is not, the two concepts cannot be equated. To argue that both should be treated the same is to overlook significant differences presented to us in Scripture. Slavery is not based on creation, whereas women's roles are.

Finally, Reaoch's book ends with a six-page conclusion, followed by a postscript of the continuing discussion of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. He also offers summaries of current literature on the topic.

This work by Reaoch is a welcomed answer to the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. His treatment of opposing views is gracious and balanced. For example, when discussing Webb's hermeneutic he is always quick to point out where he agrees with Webb and where Webb's work has made a helpful contribution. At the same time, Reaoch has exposed significant weaknesses in the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. Ultimately, the presupposition that the Bible does not present us with a complete ethic and therefore we must follow the trajectory of the Bible's ethic is subjective and even dangerous. As Reaoch rightly states, "We need not (indeed, we must not) move beyond the final and authoritative instructions of God's Word" (96).