



Vision: WE LEAD PEOPLE TO LIFE-CHANGE THAT IS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST! (2 Cor 5:17)

Mission: REACHING PEOPLE WITH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST TO ESTABLISH THEM IN THE BODY OF CHRIST AND EQUIP THEM TO BE WITNESSES FOR CHRIST, TO THE GLORY OF HIS NAME! (Col 1:28; Eph 4:11-16)

Philippians 1:21-22:

**“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me...”**

Biblical Counselling 101

31 May 2022

The Roles of Men and Women

Thinking Biblically about the Different yet Complementing Roles that God has Designed for Men and Women

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1. Introduction.

In this lesson of **Biblical Counselling 101** we will deal with the topic of *The Roles of Men and Women*. We want to think Biblically about how God designed men and women as equals before Him, both in His image, yet being different from one another but in such a way that they complement one another perfectly. God has not designed men and women to be in competition with one another, but to work together and in so doing to bring Him glory and do good to one another.

This is then an area over which there is, and always have been, much debate, confusion, deception and then sin. Even right now there are great and continuous attacks against God's design when it comes to the roles of men and women as defined and established by God through His word. It is the aim of the devil, this world and our own flesh to rebel against and reverse the order and roles that God has designed for men and women. It is important to note that this attack on God's design actually started at the very beginning of humanity in the garden of Eden. When the devil came to tempt Eve (cf. **Gen 3:1**), it was his intention and aim to openly and clearly go against the design of God who have established Adam as the head of Eve. He wanted to show his rejection of God and His design in approaching Eve, the one who were to be in submission to God and Adam, so that he placed her in the position of authority over Adam in tempting her to make a decision apart from his headship in her life. He was attacking the roles that God had given to men and women in the very first temptation!

The devil rebelled against the order and design of God, Eve and Adam fell for the temptation to do so as well, and the world has been experiencing the reality of the chaos it brings when the design and order of God is not heeded, when we sin against God, doubt His design and goodness, and think we know better! (cf. **Gen 3:14-19**)

By the grace of God, He has done everything needed in Jesus Christ to redeem us from the curse that came because of the fall so that now, in Christ Jesus in whom we are new creations, we can be renewed in our minds concerning what God's different yet complementing roles are for men and women. He has given us His Word which is sufficient to address this topic so that we can have a clear understanding of God's wonderful and beautiful design for men and women. May it then be that this lesson will help you and me to think more and more Biblically about the crucial topic!

2. Egalitarianism vs. Complementarianism.¹

Being made in God's image as male and female is not a matter of one's own autonomous preferences. Rather, it is a part of God's beautiful design and plan. Two primary approaches to understanding the Bible's teaching regarding the roles of men and women have emerged – egalitarianism and complementarianism. Here we want to evaluate both of these perspectives.

Christian reflection on the Bible's teaching about men and women reached a new departure in late modernity, especially in the wake of the sexual revolution in the West. Feminism combined with expressive individualism has totally reordered the way many people think about what it means to be male and female. It is common now to think of gender as a social construct with no necessary connection to the body's organization for reproduction. Modern technologies such as the birth control pill and elective abortion have allowed men and women to think of themselves as "freed" from the social consequences of their own fertility. As a result, feminists have been arguing for freedom from the traditional arrangements of family and home. Such innovations have presented Christian theology with a new set of challenges to the traditional understanding of scriptural texts dealing with male and female roles. Liberal theology has tended to accommodate the spirit of the age by side-lining the authority of Scripture. But among evangelical theologians who wish to honour the authority of Scripture, two primary approaches to understanding the Bible's teaching concerning the roles of men and women have emerged – egalitarianism and complementarianism.

2.1 Egalitarianism¹

Unlike liberal theology, egalitarianism claims to uphold the authority of Scripture while also embracing a feminist understanding of equality between men and women. Not only do men and women share equally in the divine image, but they also share equally in leadership roles in the church, the home, and beyond: the Bible does not assign leadership in any sphere of life based on gender.

Egalitarians do not deny *complementarity* between the sexes. They do deny that *hierarchy* has any role to play in biblical complementarity.

Egalitarians seek to ground their point of view in scriptural teaching and have jettisoned traditional interpretations of key texts in favour of revisionist alternatives. Egalitarian interpretations of **Gen 1-3** argue that male hierarchy is rooted in the fall and not in God's original good creation. On this account, **Gen 1:26-27** teaches that men and women were created equally in the image of God, and God gives both male and female equally the responsibility to rule over God's creation. Egalitarian Richard Hess concludes, "There is nothing in this first chapter to suggest anything other than an equality of male and female." In **Gen 2**, egalitarians deny that the order of creation establishes Adam as the leader in the first marriage, and that Eve's being called "*helper*" involved a subordinate role. God himself is called a "*helper*" elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., **Gen 49:25; Exo 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29**), so the term cannot be interpreted to imply subordination. On this reading, hierarchy appears only after the Fall as a part of God's curse, "*To the woman He said... 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'*" (**Gen 3:16**). Thus, the man's rule over the woman is a part of what has gone wrong with the world and that needs to be put right. It is definitely not God's original intention in creation.

Redemption in Christ aims to remove these oppressive social inequalities. Thus, **Gal 3:28** is a central text for egalitarianism. For in this text, Paul declares, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (**Gal 3:28**). Just as the gospel breaks down social hostilities between slave and free, Jew and Gentile, so also it breaks down fallen social hierarchies between male and female.

Egalitarians have pioneered a variety of hermeneutical innovations to explain biblical texts that do not seem to fit their paradigm of equality. For example, the command about wives submitting to their husbands in **Eph 5:21-22** is really about mutual submission not husbandly authority. Likewise, when Paul says that the husband is the "head" of the wife in **Eph 5:23** or **1 Cor 11:3**, the Greek term for "*head*" means either "*source*" or "*preeminent one*," but it does not mean "*authority*." When Paul writes, "*I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man*" (**1 Tim 2:12**), he means to prohibit women from teaching in a domineering fashion or perhaps teaching with an undelegated authority. But he by no means wishes to say that women cannot teach or exercise authority per se. He simply wants women to engage in teaching and leading in the right way. The words commanding women to "*keep silent in the churches*" (**1 Cor 14:34**) are most likely not even Paul's words but were added by a later scribe and can be cast aside. Many egalitarians adopt trajectory hermeneutics, which view the Bible's apparent restrictions on female leadership not as the final word but as temporary cultural accommodations that we can now safely move beyond.

Through these kinds of readings, egalitarians conclude that men and women are equal before God not only in their image-bearing but also in their respective vocations. God does not assign leadership based on gender, neither in the church nor in the home. All positions of leadership – both formal and informal – are open to women as well as to men.

2.2 Complementarianism¹

The term "Complementarianism" was coined in 1988 to refer to the teaching of the *Danvers Statement* (see *Appendix 1*), which says that while men and women are created equally in the image of God and have equal value and dignity, they nevertheless have different, complementary callings both in marriage and in the church. In marriage, God calls the husband to be the "*head*" of his wife (**1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23**), which requires him to provide self-sacrificial leadership, protection, and provision for his wife and family (**Eph 5:21-33**). In the church, although redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation, some governing and teaching roles are restricted to men. The different callings of men and women in the home and in the church are grounded in God's good creation design and are not a consequence of sin or the Fall.

Equality in Nature and Redemption¹

Complementarianism teaches "*both equality and beneficial differences*" between men and women without the differences cancelling the equality. In what sense does complementarianism teach that women and men are equal? They each individually possess the full *imago dei* and, accordingly, possess equal value and

dignity as divine image-bearers. Danvers says it this way, “*Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons...*” This follows the scriptural teaching that, “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (**Gen 1:27**). This image-bearing distinguishes human beings from every other creature. Some writers locate the *imago dei* in male and female relationship, but complementarianism holds that both male and female are each individually created in God’s image. God assigns this dignity to both irrespective of their sexual difference or marital status. They share in this status equally. Because of this, they each individually have an inestimable value and worth. No person – neither male nor female – can claim that some people are “more equal” than others. Male and female have equal value and dignity because they share equally in the divine image. This biblical doctrine of the *imago dei* is why mere complementarianism eschews any notion of male superiority or female inferiority. As Danvers states, “The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women.”

This equality also has implications for God’s redemptive work among his people. The apostle Peter writes that men and women are co-heirs of the grace of life (**1 Pet 3:7**). Likewise, the apostle Paul writes in **Gal 3:28**, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” As Danvers affirms, “*Redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation.*” This means that there is no distinction between men and women with respect to the benefits of salvation. According to God’s grace, they share equally in the grace of regeneration, justification, sanctification, indwelling, and every other benefit purchased for us through Christ. There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God.

Male and female also share equally in the assignment to rule over God’s creation. God commands male and female to “*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it*” (**Gen 1:28**). God addresses this command not only to the man but to the woman as well. That means that the mandate to rule over creation extends to men and women equally. This is not to say that they have no differences whatsoever in extending God’s dominion, but it is to say that God gives the command to both. The reason for this is clear; mankind’s rule will extend by means of multiplying and filling the earth. Thus, man and woman both have a necessary share in the procreation of humans and in the fulfilment of the dominion mandate. Man and woman are each vice-regents in the rule of God over creation.

Differences in Design and Calling¹

God assigns deep and abiding equality between men and women as image-bearers, as co-heirs of the grace of life, and as vice-regents in the creation mandate. Complementarianism insists, however, that this equality does not rule out the differences in design that God gives to both male and female. That is why Danvers says that male and female are “*equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood*” (**Gen 1:26-27, 2:18**). Scripture and nature reveal that these differences between male and female are *biological, social, and good*.

Biological Difference. The foundational biological distinction between male and female is the body’s organization for reproduction. We know this not only from the obvious differences between male and female bodies and how those differences enable procreation, but also from how these basic biological realities are confirmed in Scripture. In **Gen 1:26-28**, “*male and female*” are not social constructs but *designate biological realities*. God commands the man and woman to “*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*” (**Gen 1:28**). Procreation depends on the biologically different but complementary bodies of the man and the woman. God designs a procreative system that requires two bodies to become one, and he designs for the system of complementary differences to be united only within the covenant of marriage.

Social Difference. Complementarianism teaches that social roles for male and female stem from biological differences. In complementarianism those social differences relate most explicitly to the *home* and the *church*. Danvers addresses those two spheres explicitly in Affirmation 6.1 & 6.2:

In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands’ authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands’ leadership (**Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7**).

In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

Although the wider cultural implications of these social differences are not developed at length in Danvers, Danvers does say that *“a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large”*. Without spelling out the wider cultural implications, Danvers nevertheless says that there are implications of this teaching that reach beyond the church and the home.

In the modern, secular West, this teaching about the social differences between male and female has been fiercely contested. And yet, scriptural revelation clearly teaches that God himself has woven these differences into his distinct design of male and female. The foundational text on this point is **Gen 2:18-25**.

In **verse 18**, the word *“helper”* corresponding to Adam designates a *social role* for Eve within her marriage to Adam – a role that is inextricably linked to her biological sex. As a helper, she must affirm her husband’s leadership in their common vocation of subduing the earth. Adam’s creation before Eve designates a *social role* within his marriage to Eve – a role that is inextricably linked to his biological sex. He is to be the leader, protector, and provider within this marriage covenant. And these *social roles* within the covenant of marriage are not only creational realities; they are also commanded in Scripture.

Complementarianism teaches that God intends for a principle of male headship to exist not only in the home but also in the leadership and teaching ministry of the church. The entire congregation should affirm that leadership joyfully and willingly for the glory of God.

Good Difference. Even though God’s good design in creation may be marred by the Fall and by sin, God’s good design is not erased by the Fall and by sin. As the apostle Paul writes, *“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:4-5)*. Adam and Eve are indeed paradigms of difference even after the Fall, and those complementary differences have been pronounced *“good”* by God, and they are still good today.

Paul wishes to emphasize that his teaching about male-female difference is not something that is good for some people but not for others. It is not merely a cultural construct. It is a part of God’s creation design, and it is the pattern that must prevail in the life of every individual and of every church. Because this is true, God’s image-bearers are obligated to honour the headship norm and to beware of any attempt to denigrate this teaching as a mere cultural construct that can be set aside. Because this teaching derives from the word of God, Christians are duty bound not only to uphold it but also to cherish this teaching.

Reflecting the Trinity through Gender Distinction²

The Bible teaches that both men and women are equally created in the image of God, which sets humans apart from the rest of creation as the focus of God’s creation work. God says in **Gen 1:27**, *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”*. Mankind existing as male and female is central to their ability to reflect the image of God. We get a hint as to why this is the case in the previous verse: *“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen 1:26)*. This is the first hint in the Bible that there are distinct persons within the Godhead. The LORD exists as one God (a unified essence) and three distinct persons. Taken together, these verses imply that the distinction in gender (male and female) and gender roles (head and helper) reflects the Triune nature of God. Each person of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) are equal in essence and are fully divine. However, the Bible makes it clear that the different persons of the Trinity perform different roles. Salvation, for example, involves the sending of the Son by the Father (**John 3:16, 5:19, 6:37-38, 8:28-29**), the sacrifice of the Son (and not the Father or Spirit), the indwelling of the Spirit who is sent by the Father through the Son, and the final subjection of the conquering Son to the Father having perfectly accomplished the purpose for which He was sent (**1 Cor 15:20-28**). Within the Trinity, there is authority and submission. The Son is always submissive to the authority of the Father, and the Father is always the head over the Son (**John 5:30; 6:38**). However, there is equal deity in all three persons (**Matt 28:19; John 1:1-3**). Just as the Son’s role of submission to His head (the Father) makes Him no less valuable or divine than the Father, so also, a wife’s role of submission to her head (her own husband) makes her no less valuable or human than her husband.

Husband and wife are to reflect this equality of worth and diversity of roles found in the Trinity through their relationship for the sake of the glory of God.

2.3 Conclusion¹

God created human beings for his glory, and his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. Being made in God's image as male and female is not a matter of one's own autonomous preferences. Rather, it is a part of God's beautiful design and plan. Whereas egalitarianism tends to downplay key differences between male and female, complementarianism reflects the biblical teaching that God has designed male and female as both equal and different. They are equal bearers of the divine image, equal partakers in the grace of life, and equal partners in the creation mandate. None of this precious equality diminishes at all the biological and social differences that God has woven into his design of male and female. These beautiful differences are not contradictions but complements. They are a part of God's magnificent plan to make his glory cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

3. Key Principles Regarding Gender Roles³

Ray Ortlund: *"A man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God."*

Here are then Seven Key Principles in thinking Biblically about the roles of men and women:

- 1) Men and women equally bear the image of God and are equally saved in Christ (**Gen 1:26-27; Gal 3:28; 1 Pet 3:7**).
- 2) Although equal as image bearers, men and women are not the same. They differ anatomically, physiologically, in their evaluations, and in their God-appointed roles (**Gen 1:27; 2:18**).
- 3) Equality does not mean sameness of roles or interchangeability of roles (**Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22-25**).
- 4) The concept of an equal submitting to an equal (i.e., a wife to her husband) is based on the relationship between the Father and the Son within the Trinity (**1 Cor 11:3**). Men and women cannot exchange roles anymore that the Father and the Son can.
- 5) Adam was created first, the Eve. That order of creation was intentional, intended by God to establish who was to lead and who was to follow (**1 Tim 2:12-13**).
- 6) Eve was made by God to be a helper: she was created *from* the man, *for* the man, and led *to* the man (**Gen 2:18, 21-22**).
- 7) Adam was given the leadership role, which includes responsibility, initiative, and gracious authority (**Eph 5:22-24**).

4. Gender Roles in the Home.²

In our next lessons we will deal with the role of husbands and wives much more comprehensively, but for the sake of this lesson, we will only state briefly what is to be the role of the husband (man) and wife (women) in the home.

In **Eph 5:22-24**, Paul instructs *wives* by saying:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."

Wives are commanded to "*submit*" to their husbands, which means to take a subordinate role in relation to authority. The Greek voice that is used here implies voluntary submission. The command is for a wife to submit herself willingly and joyfully to the authority of her husband, which is a part of her submission to the Lord. The reasons for this command according to Paul are: (1) the husband is the "*head*" of his wife, which refers to a position of authority, and (2) her submission was designed by God to display the proper response

of the church to Christ (cf. **Eph 5:32**). Wives are to submit to their “*own husbands*,” rather than men in general, “*in everything*.”

In **Eph 5:25-30**, Paul instructs *husbands* by saying:

“*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.*”

Husbands should love their wife with the same covenant love Jesus has for His bride, the Church. Also, Paul makes it clear that the husband should give his wife no reason to regret his position of authority. His leadership is to be self-sacrificing, more analogous to the good shepherd of **Ps 23** than to tyranny or apathy. In their leadership role, husbands have a responsibility to seek their wife’s help, input, and counsel while making decisions for the family. In **Gen 2:18** God says, “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.*” This statement implies that husbands need the help of their wives if they are to lead their homes successfully. When a husband ignores his wife’s counsel or fails to seek her help, he acts as if he knows better than God by rejecting the helper God said he needed.

Paul’s teachings in **Eph 5:22-33** about the roles of husbands and wives are built upon and consistent with God’s original design before the fall in Eden, where Adam is given the role of leader (**Gen 2:18, 22-23; 3:1, 9; 1 Cor 11:9**) and Eve is given the role of helper (**Gen 2:18**). Since the roles of husbands and wives are rooted in creation and are designed to display the Gospel, they transcend culture and apply to all marriages at all times.

A further aspect to consider when it comes to the roles of men and women in the home, is that it also reflects something of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead, in the Trinity. Joel James points it out like this:³

A man reflects God the Father’s leadership both in the *fact* that he leads and in *how* he leads:

- The Father’s leadership includes *initiative* (**John 5:37; 3:16**).
- The Father’s leadership includes *exalting* the one led (**John 17:1-2**).
- The Father’s leadership includes *abiding*: a close, enduring, intimate relationship (**John 17:23-25**).
- The Father’s leadership includes *loving words and expressions of approval*: “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” (**Matt 3:17; 17:5**)

A woman reflects God the Son both in the *fact* that she submits to her husband and in *how* she submits to him:

- Christ *actively sought* the leadership of His Father (**Matt 26:39; John 5:30**).
- Christ *followed* the Father’s agenda, not seeking His own freedom or independence (**John 5:19**).
- Christ came to *serve*, not to compete with His Father for glory (**John 7:18**).
- Christ *submitted* even when He would have preferred a different plan: “Not as I will, but as You will.” (**Matt 26:39**)

If role reversal has taken place, it’s usually because *both* partners are failing in some way. For example, the husband may need to become a better leader. However, because of her bossy and contentious attitude, his wife might be making it hard for him to lead. In short, husbands make submission easier by being attentive, caring leaders; wives make leadership easier in being gentle, supportive followers.

5. Gender Roles in the Church.²

If we as Christian men and women want to please God by using our full potential in the area of the local church, we must understand the unique functions for which we have been designed in the church. If God’s will regarding the role of men and women in the church is ignored or misrepresented, that particular church cannot claim to be honouring Him, regardless of whatever other qualities it may boast.

The fact that the God has reserved and designed men and women to have different roles in the church, does not in any way impose upon the priesthood of all believers namely that every believer has a personal relationship with God and can serve His church according to the gifts that He has given them (cf. **1 Pet 2:4-9; 4:10-11**). What it does however imply is that God's gifting of believers will always be in line with His design for men and women and the different yet complementing roles they have been designed to fulfil in the church.

In **1 Tim 2:11-14**, Paul writes:

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

The gender roles of the home correlate with gender roles in the local church. One implication of this passage is that the office of pastor/elder is reserved only for men in the church. This is in line with Paul's instructions regarding qualifications of elders, all of which assume a male subject (**1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9**).

Further, this passage teaches that women are not to hold an official teaching position over men in the church. Within these boundaries, women are free to serve in a variety of ways in churches. Women with the gift of teaching should steward their gift to teach other women as well as the next generation in the church. These prescriptions apply specifically to the gathered body and not necessarily to life outside the church (**1 Tim 3:15**). Men would certainly be wise to learn from women in a vast number of situations (**Acts 18:26**). The prohibition in this passage is against women teaching men publicly in formal church gatherings.

It is important to note that Paul bases his prohibitions in the creation account rather than the local church in Ephesus, a lack of women's education in the first century, or the supposed problems of heretical female teachers. Thus, the prohibitions are conveyed as universal commands.

The different role of men and women in the church can then be categorized as follows:⁴

The role of *men* in the church is that they are to be:

- **Loving Leaders** – Leadership over the entire church is a role that has been designed especially for men. The men in every church should therefore not shrink back from leadership opportunities but should strive to become men who are qualified and able to lead the church of Jesus lovingly, as servant leaders, just as Jesus came to serve and not be served. (**1 Tim 3:1; Matt 20:27-28**)
- **Effective Teachers** – The role of teaching the word of God to all of the people of God is also one that has been reserved primarily for men. Although God's plan includes women communicating the principles of His Word to children and other women, He has ordained that men alone should feed the whole flock of God when it gathers (**1 Tim 4:12-14; 1 Cor 14:34-35**). Every man in the church should be intentionally developing and practising his teaching skills, because every man is at least a husband or potential husband, and God has commanded husbands to be teachers in the home as well (**Deut 6:6-7; Eph 5:25-27; 6:4**).
- **Godly Examples** – Although every member of the body of Christ is commanded to be a godly example that leads others to grow in Christ, the men in the church are especially commissioned to serve others in this way. Being an example is such an integral part of effective leading and teaching that those roles cannot be fulfilled effectively without it (**1 Pet 5:3; 2 Thess 3:6-7**). Also, husbands are called by God to relate to their wives in a way that typifies the Great Example, Jesus Christ (**Eph 5:25-27**).

The role of *women* in the church is that they are to be:

- **Submissive Learners** – Based on **1 Cor 11:3-10, 14:34-38, and 1 Tim 2:11-14**, two concepts are very clear: (1) In the context of the local church, each woman should submit herself to male leadership and should learn from the teaching of men rather than being a teacher of men. (2) Eldership and other positions of authority are not a biblical option for a Christian woman, nor is any kind of teaching role in which she would be exercising authority over men. God has designed for the submissive learning of women to be a key element in the revelation of His character through the church and the effective witness of the body.
- **Gifted Trainers** – Women are not intended to teach men, but that does not mean they are without giftedness in the areas of discipling and training. On the contrary, they are essential instruments in

God's plan for education of children and other women. (**1 Tim 5:9-10** (cf. **Eph 6:4** for "brought up"); **Tit 2:3-5**) Since there are more women and children in the world than men, what a mission field women have!

- **Skilled Hostesses** – Hospitality is a command given to all Christians but is also mentioned specifically in **1 Tim 5:10** as one of the things that characterizes a godly women. Many women are very skilled at opening up their homes for other people so as to serve and have a godly influence on them
- **Humble Servants** – Again all Christians are called to be servants, but again **1 Tim 5:10** lists this as a role that characterizes a godly women in that she washed the saints feet and cared for the afflicted. The church of Christ is daily in need and there are many and various opportunities to serve in those needs.

6. Brief Responses to Common Objections.²

Objection #1: What about women that the Bible describes as teaching other men or having authority over men (e.g. Deborah in Judges 4-5 and Priscilla in Acts 18)?

Response: There is no way to address briefly all the relevant details of all these types of passages. It should always be remembered that as the inerrant word of God, the Bible never contradicts itself. We believe that careful exegesis that considers the context of each of these passages would demonstrate that they do not contradict the didactic teaching found in the passages mentioned in the above document.

Furthermore, it is best hermeneutically to allow the prescriptive teachings in Paul's epistles to inform our interpretation and application of the descriptive passages of the Bible involving the actions of individual women in specific situations.

Objection #2: The passages that restrict women's roles are culturally and historically specific and therefore should not apply to homes and churches today.

Response: The problem with this objection is that Paul bases the assigned roles of men and women in pre-fallen creation (**1 Cor 11:8-9; Eph 5:31-32, 1 Tim 2:13-14**). Furthermore, the roles between men and women exist to display the universal and unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ (**Eph 5:22-33**). Thus, these gender roles can be no more culturally specific than the Gospel itself.

Objection #3: Functional inequality between sexes is a result of the fall that redemption seeks to remedy. Thus, Galatians 3:28 says that there is "no male and female" in Christ.

Response: There is ample evidence that demonstrates distinction in gender roles existed before the fall and therefore could not have been the result of the fall: (1) Adam was created first (**1 Tim 2:13**), (2) Eve was created as a helper for Adam (**1 Cor 11:9**), (3) Adam named Eve, (4) God named the human race "man" and not "woman," (5) the serpent came to Eve first (**1 Tim 2:14**), (6) God came to Adam first after the fall, and (7) Adam, not Eve, represents the human race (**1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:15**).

Gal 3:18 teaches that in Christ there are no factions or attitudes of pride or superiority. Being one in Christ does not require everyone to be functionally identical. For example, **Rom 12:4-5** says that all parts of the body are one in Christ while serving different roles. No part may look down on another but must honour one another in their differences. Functional inequality is not something that Jesus feels should be resisted, for he will gladly submit to the Father for eternity (**1 Cor 15:20-28**).

Objection #4: Ephesians 5:21 commands mutual submission. Husbands are to submit to their wives as much as wives are to submit to husbands.

Response: Eph 5:21 must not be pulled from the rest of the text. The next twenty verses expound upon **verse 21**. Wives are to be submissive to husbands, children are to obey their parents, and bondservants are to obey their masters. Husbands, parents, and masters are to exercise incredible kindness toward those under their authority because of their equal value in Christ. **Eph 5:21**, therefore, is a call to all Christians to behave properly toward those in authority over them.

Objection #5: Many women are more gifted to teach and lead than many men in the church. Why would God gift them to teach if He did not want them to?

Response: The first part of this objection is pragmatic rather than biblical. The goal must not be just to achieve quality teaching and leadership for the church, but to do so according to the design that God established in creation to reflect His image and bring Him glory. God gifts women to teach because there are many venues in the church within which their teaching is appropriate and needed.

Objection #6: The Bible may very well teach that wives should submit to their husbands, but this instruction is demeaning to women. Women should seek liberation from these outdated commands.

Response: The Bible should never become an add-on to one's culturally developed feelings. The Christian must consider whether they will mould God's Word into their own image or let God's Word sculpt them. We believe that the Bible is not at all demeaning to women. Indeed, we believe it honours them. We believe in a high view of manhood and womanhood that understands the beauty and honour inherent in the God-given distinctions between sexes. We believe that differences between men and women are purposeful and that their differences are a part of the beautiful plan of God. Women are different than men. These differences are things to be honoured, not destroyed. Genuine freedom is found by living fully submitted to Christ and his commands, which is the best and most joyful way to live. God created us and knows what is best for us. Therefore, true liberation can only be found by submitting ourselves to the teaching and commands of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

7. Conclusion

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible paints a unified picture of what it means to be a man or a woman. The dual pattern of male leadership and male-female partnership pervades all of Scripture: from creation to the fall to redemption in Christ and to the final consummation. God's way is for men to lead their families, fathers to mentor their sons in biblical, God-honouring masculinity, and for mothers to mentor their daughters in biblical, God-honouring femininity. Not only is this to happen in the natural family, it is also to take place in God's family, the church, especially where family structures are broken. We are therefore to take heed to and practise our God given roles as men and women in the home and in the church. As we do so, we will see the blessing of God on our families and in our churches, for the design of God is good and glorious! May we trust Him, love Him, obey Him and serve Him in the roles of the men and women He has called us to be and this all to the glory of His Name!

8. Notes and Bibliography

Notes:

1. Taken and adapted from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-roles-of-men-and-women/>
2. Taken and adapted from <https://www.macarthurlvd.org/complementary-roles-of-men-and-women/>
3. Taken and adapted from *A Quick Reference Guide for Biblical Counsellors and Disciplers*; Joel James.
4. Taken and adapted from *Life in the Father's House*; Wayne Mack; Dave Swavely.

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Mack, WA; Swavely, D. 2006. *Life in the Fathers House*. P&R Publishing Company.

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<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-roles-of-men-and-women/>

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APPENDIX 1: The Danvers Statement

Prepared in December 1987 and Published in November 1988

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (*Gen 1:26-27, 2:18*).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (*Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14*).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (*Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9*).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (*Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16*).
 - 1) In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - 2) In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (*Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28*). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (*Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15*).
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 - 1) In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (*Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7*).
 - 2) In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (*Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15*).
6. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (*Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2*).
7. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (*1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9*). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
8. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (*1 Cor 12:7-21*).
9. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

APPENDIX 2: The Biblical Roles of Men and Women (BJUToday)

The Central Question

Does the Bible, in its clear and normative teaching, establish unique aspects of primary leadership in marriage and in the church that are restricted to biblically qualified men?

This question is not asking whether the Bible teaches that men are superior and women inferior to one another – the Bible clearly states men and women were created with equal value, standing, blessing and participation in the promises of God to Abraham (**Gen 1:27-28; Gal 3:28**) and are co-heirs of the grace of life (**1 Pet 3:7**).

Nor is this question implying that somehow women are less qualified or equipped than men to participate in vocational or spiritual ministry.

This question is asking whether the Bible establishes and restricts certain aspects of primary leadership and spiritual authority to qualified men in marriage and in the church.

The Contrasting Views

Complementarian

Complementarians believe that primary responsibility and spiritual authority to lead in the marriage and home, and to teach authoritatively and spiritually govern the Church has been assigned and restricted to biblically qualified men.

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is a flagship complementarian organization, and here is how they define their mission:

“The mission of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is to set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women, created equally in the image of God, because these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and the church.”

Egalitarian

Egalitarians believe that biblically qualified women can lead equally with biblically qualified men in the home and in the Church.

The Centre for Biblical Equality is a flagship egalitarian organization, and here is how they define their mission:

“CBE exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church and world.”

So, when we look at *Scripture*, who has it right?

There are four primary terms in Scripture that help shed light on the Biblical answer to this debate.

Four Key Terms:

“Helper” – **Genesis 2:18**

Help: To come alongside and supply what is lacking or what is missing that is necessary for the success of the mission.

“Submission” – **1 Peter 3:1; Ephesians 5:21-24; Colossians 3:18-19**

Submission means to arrange oneself properly toward others God has placed over me.

“Head” – **Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 11:2-4**

This does not mean “*source*” or “*origin*” as in the head of the Jordan River. In these contexts, it clearly means “*leader*,” as for instance Jesus is the leader of the Church.

“Authority” – **1 Timothy 2:11-15**

This is the “*authority*” to teach or preach God’s Word from an office or position that is binding on believers. It specifically has a church or religious instruction context.

Summary

Throughout the Scriptures, God has always honoured, valued and blessed the role of godly women. However, the clear and plain teaching of Scripture establishes and restricts certain aspects of leadership and responsibility in marriage and in God’s church to biblically qualified men. This restriction is not merely cultural accommodation necessary for a particular time and in a particular culture for the Gospel’s sake.

Neither did this restriction come about as a consequence to the Fall – it was designed into the very creation of Adam and Eve. It was corrupted after the Fall – men would be tempted and oriented to leading women in harsh and tyrannical ways, and women would be tempted to usurp and resist the leadership and authority of their husband.

Jesus – the author, Creator and Sustainer of both old and new creations – affirmed, confirmed and restored the original created order so that, as His new creation, men are to lead by loving service and women are to joyfully support that leadership in their home and in the church.