

Complementarianism

What We Believe about God's Design of Gender Roles

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'

Mark 10:6¹

There are hardly more discussed and debated topics within Evangelicalism than the issues concerning manhood, womanhood, and the respective relationship between the two. Yet, in a world where ambiguity reigns in regard to our understanding of gender and roles, Scripture is not silent and it is helpful for churches to clarify what they believe concerning the Biblical issue of gender in order to bring clarity and order to the church. The aim of this paper is to articulate and provide clarity on what The Chapel believes Scripture teaches concerning God's design of men and women and their respective roles in the church and home.

The Chapel, as has been our conviction throughout our history, is complementarian in our understanding of God's design of men and women and their respective roles. While we will seek to understand this view from Scripture, it is first helpful to clarify what we mean when we say that we are complementarian.

What is Complementarianism?

Complementarianism is the belief that God has created men and women with equal worth, dignity, value, and personhood but that He has given them distinct and complementary roles in both the home and the church. Further, Scripture affirms that God has given the role of headship in the home and elder in the church to men and the role of helper in the home and non-elder roles in the church to women in the church.² Several points of clarification are in order before we unpack this understanding biblically and theologically.

- (1) Often Complementarianism is seen solely in opposition to egalitarianism, which is the belief that there are no distinctions in roles for men and women (both complementarians and egalitarians hold to equal value, dignity, worth and personhood). However, Complementarianism also stands opposite to Ancient Patriarchalism, which removes the equality of value, dignity, worth, and personhood from women. Thus, Complementarianism seeks to be a middle position that robustly upholds the Biblical truths of equal value and different roles for men and women.
- (2) Complementarianism is primarily related to the roles of men and women as it relates to the church and to the home i.e. positions of spiritual authority. While some seek to broaden this position to other areas, e.g. governmental, civic, business, etc., we do not believe that Scripture speaks clearly to the roles of men and women outside of the institutions of the home and the church. Thus, we believe there to be freedom in regard to the roles of men and women outside of the home and church.

So what does Scripture teach about men, women, and their roles in the church and home?

Equality in Personhood

The clear affirmation of the equality of men and women in terms of dignity, value, essence and human nature is found throughout Scripture. However, two primary passages help us to see this truth most clearly. It is first established in God's design and creation of the world.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from English Standard Version® (ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway

² The use of the term "non-elder" is utilized to communicate the robust nature of roles for women within the church.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Gen 1:26 - 27

In Genesis 1 we find the account of God's creation, order, and design of the world. The clear climax of the passage comes in God's creation of human beings. God creates both men and women after His image and gives them the responsibility of ruling over his creation under his authority. God creates humanity as a plurality.³ Thus, both are endowed with the imprint of the eternal God on their personhood and in this both men and women find their worth, dignity and value. While The Fall mars the image of God in humanity, it does not entirely remove it. For even after The Fall, God still speaks to the inherent value of humankind in their being created in His image (Gen 9:6). Men and Women have equal value and worth in their personhood because they are created in the image of God.

We not only see an equality of personhood in creation, we also see it in God's great plan of redemption. In one of the great articulations of the works of the Gospel and salvation, the Apostle Paul writes:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3:25 – 29

Paul instructs the Galatians that in God's great work of redemption in Christ Jesus we have been united together and are all considered now to be children of God. He makes this clear by his placing v. 28 in the context of baptism. Baptism is the outward demonstration of the inward reality of faith in Christ and it makes clear that salvation was open to all.⁴ Therefore, this passage clearly and definitively speaks to God's valuing of all people in His work of salvation. As Kostenberger notes, "...we conclude that Paul's actual purpose in Galatians 3:28 is to teach racial, socioeconomic, and gender unity in Christ. The various groups in the church—Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female—while remaining distinct (i.e., not equal or literally the same), are unified (i.e., figuratively one) in Christ."⁵

Further, we see that in God's work of redemption He pours out His Spirit equally on his people, displaying his equal valuing of both men and women.

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."

Acts 2:17 - 18

In God's two great works of creation and redemption we see the continual truth that men and women are equal in their essence and personhood. They are endowed with worth, dignity and value. This is a central tenet of God's plan

³ Kostenberger, Andreas J., and Margaret E. Kostenberger. 2014. *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway., 29

⁴ Blomberg, Craig L. 2005. 'Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective'. In *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, edited by James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry, Revised. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Kindle Edition. Loc. 2791.

⁵ Kostenberger and Kostenberger 2014, 164

for creation and redemption and therefore must be upheld in high regard. Any theology that does not uphold the equality and value of men and women in their essence and personhood is not Biblical in its understanding of gender and must be criticized in light of the clear teaching of Holy Scripture.

Different in Roles

While Scripture clearly attests to the equality of men and women in their essence and personhood, it also clearly witnesses to designed distinctions in the roles which men and women are called to live as children of God. These roles are directly related to God's design of the family and the church.⁶

Roles in the Family

Much like we see the equality of men and women in both creation and redemption, we also see their distinct created roles for the family in both creation and redemption. We believe that God has designed the family in such a way that men are to be the sacrificial leader and head of their wives and children and women are to be helpers who submit to the headship of the man. We recognize that in our current culture the words chosen in that last sentence can seem barbaric and outdated, but we believe Scripture clearly teaches these truths. This design can clearly be seen in the following passages:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."⁷

Genesis 2:18

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Corinthians 11:3

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 Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 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 splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5:22-27

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Peter 3:1-2, 7

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Colossians 3:18 – 19

It is clear throughout Scripture that God has designed marriage and family with distinct roles for men and women. Man is the head who has been given authority by God to lead his wife and family and who is called to sacrificially love and serve them for their flourishing.⁸ In this way man images Christ's love for and headship of the Church. Likewise, women are called to the role of corresponding helper (*ezer k^enegdo*, Gen 2:18) who submit to and respect their husbands as their head. In this way they image the Church's submission to and love for Christ. While husbands

⁶ Also, technically speaking, the nation of Israel as well. But, that discussion is not in the purview of this paper.

⁷ There term utilized for "helper fit for him" is "ezer k^enegdo" which is literally translated as "helper corresponding to him."

⁸ Some argue that the term "head" as found in these passages does mean "authority over", but merely "source" or "origin." For a defense of the Biblical meaning as "authority over" see Wayne Grudem, "Does Κεφαλή ("Head") Mean "Source" Or "Authority Over" in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," Trinity Journal ns 6.1 (Spring 1985): 38-59.

and wives remain completely equal in essence and personhood, it is through these complementary roles that they bear witness to the greater spiritual realities of Christ and His church.

Roles in the Church

God has not only designed distinct roles for men and women in the home but also in the church. We believe that God has given qualified men the authority to lead and authoritatively teach the church through serving as Elders and has called men and women to serve the church through a variety of gifts and roles (eg. deacons/deaconesses). Scripture instructs us along these lines in several passages:

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. 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.

1 Timothy 2:8-14

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

1 Timothy 3:2

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

Titus 1:5-6

The Scripture continues to bear witness to God's design that men are given the distinctive role of Elder and therefore the highest authority in the church, all under the submission to Christ as the head of the church (1 Peter 5:1 – 5). Biblical Scholar Craig Blomberg expounds on this further,

“Thus, the two important responsibilities that set apart the elder, or overseer, from the rest of the church are their teaching and their exercising of authority—precisely the concepts involved in 2:12. It appears probable, therefore, that the only thing Paul is prohibiting women from doing in that verse is occupying the office of overseer or elder. This fits what we saw in our survey of Acts and the non-prescriptive material in the Epistles—women filling every major role in church life and leadership except that of elder.”⁹

Blomberg notes that the New Testament is full of women who fulfill a variety of roles within the church, but there is not a single text within the New Testament that ascribes ultimate authority or eldership to women. This is in line with the rest of the Scripture where we see women hold valuable and incredible roles within various communities of faith (Israel, Jesus' disciples, etc.) but who are not given ultimate spiritual authority over the community.¹⁰ Women

⁹ Blomberg 2005, Kindle Locations 3055-3058.

¹⁰ The most notable potential exception would be Deborah in Judges 4 – 5, but closer study reveals that she did not function in a role of ultimate spiritual authority such as a priest or a king, but instead as a prophetess and judge (decider of disputes). She also portrays the lack of leadership by the priests and those in authority in Israel at the time, eg. Barak.

function as prophets (and in Deborah's case a judge as well) in the Old Testament (Ex. 15:20; Jdg 4; 2 Chr 34:22 – 26), strategic disciples to Jesus (Lk 8:1 – 2, 10:38 – 42; Jn 4) and deaconesses, patrons, co-workers, etc. (Romans 16:1 – 3, 1 Tim 3:11 – 13).¹¹ But women are never appointed as Priests or Kings in the Old Testament who were highest spiritual authorities in Israel, and likewise Jesus chose twelve men as his Apostles who were given his authority to establish the church (Mt 16). So it seems throughout the whole of Scripture that God appoints men to positions of highest spiritual authority. Blomberg again notes this pattern,

*In light of this consistent pattern, it is hard to escape the twin conclusions that (1) male headship is a timeless, God-ordained principle for home and church, but (2) unlike its manifestation in secular society or other religions, among God's people it is limited to the highest office and even then transformed into a model of loving servanthood that puts others, especially women, above self.*¹²

New Testament Scholar Andreas Kostenberger, also notes in His biblical survey on manhood and womanhood,

The biblical theology of manhood and womanhood exhibits a clear pattern of male leadership from Genesis through Revelation. The biblical-theological survey doesn't depend on one or two isolated texts but rests on the firm foundation of the unified, coherent, and consistent scriptural witness.¹³

Thus, we believe that Scripture continually attests to male headship in the home and male Eldership in the church. These are the distinct roles that God has designed for his people and they are designed for our good and for His glory and therefore we seek to live out these Biblical realities in our homes and in our church to the glory of God.

Rooted in God

Some argue that to proclaim equality of personhood while restricting roles of spiritual leadership in the home and church from women is not actual equality and that the call to submission demeans the value of women. However, we believe that Scripture clearly affirms that one can have equal value and essence while being distinct in their role even to the point of submission to another. We look no further than Jesus' relationship with The Father. Scripture affirms Jesus' quality of with the Father in the essence and nature of being God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

John 10:29-30

However, Scripture also attests to Jesus' submission to the Father as well.

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Corinthians 11:3

And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

¹¹ Some argue that Junia (Rom 16:7) was an apostle but the Greek here is disputed and seems to be translated either "well known to the apostles" or "well known among the apostles." For a further explanation see the article *Wallace and Burer "Was Junia really an apostle."* Even some who argue for the latter also recognize that it is likely in reference to the role of little "a" apostle which is distinct from elders, and seen more in line with modern missionaries.

¹² Blomberg 2005, Kindle Locations 3231-3234

¹³ Kostenberger and Kostenberger 2014, 255 – 256

Mark 14:36

You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

John 14:28

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

John 6:38

So we see that even within the Godhead there is an equality of essence but a difference of roles even to the point of submission. Thus, to uphold the Biblical teaching of distinction in gender roles, in regards to male headship and female submission in the home and to male eldership in the church, in no way diminishes the value, dignity, or worth of women. In fact, we see in Scripture that just as God takes on the role of *Ezer* in the OT (Ps 33:20, Hos 13:9) and Jesus submits to the Father, and the Church submits to Christ that there is in incredible divinely ordained dignity in the role that God has given to women.

Thus, we reject any claims that somehow gender roles is demeaning or condescending to women. This is just simply not true in regards to Biblical roles found in Scripture. In fact, the design of gender roles better enables both men and women to ascribe glory and value to God and to give witness to the greater reality and truth concerning Christ and His Church. Therefore, we fully affirm and believe that God has designed men and women with equality in their essence and personhood but that He has given them distinct roles within the family and the church to better glorify Himself and to bring to both men and women greater joy.

A Call to a Robust Complementarian Theology

This paper is theological and positional in nature and is not seeking to ascribe policy or application to the church. However, due to the cultural sensitivity of this issue and because of the lack of consistent practice by the evangelical church we felt it necessary to call the church to a robustness of this theology and felt it necessary to clarify a few things based on the theological teaching of Scripture.

- (1) A Biblically informed complementarian theology will recognize the value and worth of women and will seek to orient the practices of the family and church in such a way as to see their flourishing and not their diminishing. We reject any teaching of complementarian theology that does not fully embrace or seek the prospering of women. Although, we acknowledge that Scripture will not align with the beliefs and practices of the world in this regard. We also clarify that Scripture in no way calls a woman to submit to men in general, or to their husbands or elder who are acting in a sinful manner. A woman is never to be subjected to any form of abuse (verbal, emotional, spiritual, physical, etc.) under the guise of submission or because of complementarian theology.
- (2) Likewise, the role of headship, given to husbands, and elder, given to qualified men, is for their flourishing and their exercising of this role must be done in humility and submission to Christ and Holy Scripture. Complementarian theology does not give authority to men unconditionally.
- (3) The Bible clearly allows for women to fulfill almost any role of the church except that of Elder. Therefore, any practice that inhibits women from exercising their God-given gifts in non-elder roles within the church falls outside of the Biblical teaching and should be rejected.
- (4) Gifting in Scripture does not directly equate to authority. While we recognize the incredible diversity of gifting that God has given to women we believe those gifts are meant for the edification of the body in non-elder roles.