

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

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When it comes to the role of women in the church, there are two principle views. One is known as the complementarian view, also known as the traditional or hierarchical view. The other position is that held by evangelical feminists and known as the egalitarian view. Of these two, the complementarian view is the position supported by Scripture. God created men and women equal, but he also created them different and intended them to fulfill different roles. God created the man to be the head of the family; the husband, father, provider, protector, and leader. God designed the woman as a helpmate suitable for the man (Gn 2:18). She is to actively help and submit to the man's leadership. One way in which she helps is to remind her Christian husband of his God ordained role and encourages him to fulfill it. But submission does not mean being a door mat. Paul is clear as to the role of women in the church (Rm 16:1-2; 1 Tm 2:9-15; Tit 2:3-5). It is identical to their role in the home. It is a role of helping, service, and submission, not teaching and leadership.

Titus 2:3 is often misunderstood by many to grant a teaching role to women, and it does, but the question is what are they to teach. Paul tells us. They are to be *teaching what is good.* Well, what is good? Paul tells us in verses 4 and 5, *that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands,* and then Paul gives the reason young women are to be taught these principles, *that the word of God may not be dishonored.* In essence the older women in the church are to teach the younger women in the church what it means to be a suitable helper. For the woman to step outside her God ordained role and usurp the role of the man is to dishonor, or place a low value on God's word. When the role differences between men and women are properly understood and practiced, they foster biblical manhood and womanhood and deeply enrich the life of the family and the church. As the word *complementarian* suggests, the God ordained roles of men and women complement each other, not compete.

This view is very unpopular today for several reasons. No one can deny that the values which have been embraced by our culture have had a devastating impact on the family. As Christians we expect to have our beliefs and the values and principles taught in Scripture mocked, ridiculed, and opposed by the unbelieving world. But it is especially shocking and demoralizing when key biblical principles are ignored, ridiculed, and rejected by those who profess to be Christians and stand

for biblical truth. Perhaps no other foundational principle of Scripture has been more universally ignored, redefined, and rejected, with shattering consequences for the family and church than the principle of biblical male headship. This principle is in immediate need of reclamation by those who profess to believe in the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture and in the timeless nature of God's principles as taught in Scripture.

In the past 40 or 50 years we have witnessed the progressive feminization of our culture along with a disdainful and mocking disregard for the biblical roles of men and women. For the first time in American history women now outnumber men in the work place. The wife is now the principle bread winner in more than one out of five homes. More women than men now attend college. Some of the highest political offices in our country are now held by women. Most people today would consider this a good trend and laud it as a triumph for gender equality. But from a biblical perspective it demonstrates how completely the biblical roles of men and women have been rejected, and sometimes reversed, not only by society, but by a large portion of professing Christians. Among unbelievers more and more men and women are viewing marriage as an unnecessary burden, distraction, and interference with the pursuit of their own individualistic career goals, opting rather for a cohabitating relationship where there is no distinction in gender roles. For women to pursue a career of worldly success, power, and influence is considered infinitely superior and more personally rewarding than being a mere godly wife and mother. The disdain which a person holds for the biblical role of women is measured by their reaction when a woman says her goal is to be a godly wife and mother. Such women are often met with the retort, "Is that all you want to be?"

Egalitarianism has replaced complementarianism in the culture, and this Cultural Revolution has spilled over into the church. Within the church more and more denominations and congregations are embracing female spiritual leadership, both in the pulpit and in leadership roles within the church. This spirit of egalitarianism is even reflected in how some churches have changed the programs they offer. For instance, many churches have changed the name of their Mother's Day Out program to *Parent's Day Out*. God established certain roles for men and women within the family, the church, and in society, and when men and women fulfill those biblical roles this creates harmony and joy within the home. These different roles complement one another, not compete with each other. But when men abdicate their God given role or women usurp the role of men; the family, church, and society all pay the consequences. We need look no further for validation than the state of the family today. God is not mocked. No society, church, or person can

violate God's timeless principles with impunity. *Who has defied Him without harm* (Job 9:4b)?

While we would expect to find opposition to the principle of male headship within the culture, it is opposed just as vigorously within much of the professing church. It is usually portrayed as the antiquated relic of a patriarchal, male-dominated Middle-Eastern culture which is now outdated in our enlightened, modern, pluralistic, egalitarian age. Paul's instructions found in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 regarding the role of women in the church are usually dismissed as evidence of Paul's own male chauvinism, or as applying only to a specific situation within the church in Ephesus. But the fact that Paul bases his teaching on the roles ordained by God in creation (2:13, 14) and that his expressed purpose for writing to Timothy was *so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God* (3:15), proves that his instructions regarding the role of women in the church are based on God's timeless, unchanging roles ordained in creation, and are to have universal application within the church. But instead of embracing and submitting to God's prescriptions as His very best for us, we are told we need to rethink God's word in light of the values of our contemporary culture. To glibly dismiss God's principles because an egalitarian and feminized culture finds them unpalatable is exegetically irresponsible and morally and spiritually rebellious.

The great tragedy inherent with this egalitarian rationalization is that it perpetuates the same rebellion that infected the human race with sin. Man becomes the ultimate determiner of what biblical principles are relevant or irrelevant, which are to be obeyed and which can be ignored. Man is ultimate. This is paganism at its core. Quite often the reason given for ignoring or denying God's ordained roles for men and women is the fact that many men have abused this principle. But a wrong application of a principle does not give us the liberty to redefine God's ordained gender roles. You cannot correct disobedience by further disobedience; *evil will not deliver those who practice it* (Eccl 8:8d). You correct disobedience with obedience. Christian men need to learn what it means to be biblical men, husbands, and fathers (1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7), and Christian women need to learn what it means to be biblical women, wives, and mothers (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6).

Our culture instinctively views the biblical principle of male headship as chauvinistic, archaic, Neanderthal, controlling, dictatorial, enslaving, demeaning, and even emotionally abusive. This is not surprising since the Bible tells us the world is fallen and darkened in its understanding (Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19), that it suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rm 1:16), and to the unregenerate mind God's word is foolishness (1 Cor 2:14). The tragedy is that much of the professing

church shares the culture's opinion when it comes to the biblically defined roles of men and women. But God does not give a father and husband headship over his wife and children, especially daughters (Nm 30), in order to dominate and control them for his own selfish ends. That is not God's character, and to insinuate otherwise is not only to reject God's roles for men and women, but to impugn the character of God.

The Bible makes it clear that women are the weaker sex (1 Tm 2:9-15; 1 Pt 3:7), and that children need guidance, discipline, and instruction (all of Prov; Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). Women and children need to be protected, and children need to be trained in godliness. Rather than being demeaning, this belief places a high value on women and children. It is human nature for a person to guard and protect what they highly value. They put their money in a bank, place their valuables in safety deposit boxes, have home security systems, and take many other precautions to guard what is precious to them. So how irrational is it for people to reject the very principles God has given for the purpose of securing our ultimate welfare? Yet this is precisely what our culture does on every level, but no more so than in its rejection of God's ordained roles for men and women. An egalitarian mindset recoils in horror at God's principles while at the same time denying and ignoring the obvious truth that women are different from men biologically, emotionally, and relationally.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to cannibals of the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific, John G. Paton, noted this about a culture's treatment of women, *“Oh, how sad and degraded is the position of women where the teaching of Christ is unknown, or disregarded though known! It is the Christ of the Bible, it is His Spirit entering into humanity that has lifted woman, and made her the helpmate and the friend of man, not his toy or his slave.”*

Far from elevating women, the philosophy of egalitarianism has succeeded in producing a culture where women are no longer highly valued, honored, and respected. What man today stands when a woman enters the room, or holds the door and allows the woman to go first, or opens the car door for her, or is concerned with protecting her virtue and reputation? These symbols of honor, respect, esteem, and admiration are long forgotten, having been thoroughly eradicated from our social consciousness. Instead immodesty is a virtue, pornography has become mainstream, and women are viewed as little more than the means of self-gratification. Fathers let their daughters dress like prostitutes. Feminists have succeeded in winning for women the right to be treated no better than men, to be as coarse, crude, and profane as men, to be treated as a competitor instead of a companion, and to be exploited rather than nurtured. In short, feminists

have won women the right to be treated no differently than women have always been treated where *“the teaching of Christ is unknown, or disregarded though known.”* And we call this progress?

A Christian husband and father is not fooled by the false claims, empty promises, and illusory privileges of egalitarianism, rather he self-sacrificially carries out his God ordained responsibility before the Lord, even in the face of a hostile and antagonistic culture. He has the faith and fortitude to defend the truth and stick to his convictions. And a Christian woman finds her ultimate joy and satisfaction in fulfilling the role God has instituted for her life.

God knows us better than we know ourselves, and the gender roles He has instituted are the best possible for our ultimate welfare and the welfare of His church. They are certainly better than those we might concoct for ourselves. When men and women fulfill their respective God ordained roles this brings peace, joy, and harmony to a marriage, family, and church, and society reaps the benefits.