

Should Gender Roles Keep Us from Obeying God's Calling?

1. A Historical Summary – Evangelical Christians Divided

1) Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) – In 1973 a group of socially concerned Christians met in Chicago and drafted the “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern.” Dr. Ronald Sider took the lead in founding the ESA and has been very influential in its ministry since then.

2) Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) – At ESA's second consultation in 1974, six task forces were formed to study such concerns as racism, sexism, peace, and simpler lifestyles. The EWC began as one of those task forces. It presented proposals to the ESA, including the “endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment, support for inclusive language in Bible translations, and Christian publications, affirmation of the ordination of women, and criticism of discriminatory hiring policies in Christian institutions.” In 1990, in order to reflect its increasingly inclusive nature and varied membership, EWC changed its name to Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC).

3) Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) – In 1986 the EWC passed a resolution stating, “Whereas homosexual people are children of God, and because of the biblical mandate of Jesus Christ that we are all created equal in God's sight, and in recognition of the presence of the lesbian minority in EWC, EWC takes a firm stand in favor of civil rights protection for homosexual persons.” As a result of this action a group of more conservative members withdrew from the EWC and formed a new organization called Christians for Biblical Equality. In August 1987 this new organization was incorporated in Minnesota.

In 1989 seven CBE members (Gilbert Bilezikian, W. Ward Gasque, Stanley N. Gundy, Gretchen Gaebelin Hull, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Jo Anne Lyon, and Roger Nicole), prepared CBE's Statement on “Man, Woman and Biblical Equality.” In the introduction to this Statement, the authors set forth their basic position:

The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption (Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, 5:1-2; 1 Cor 11:11-12; Gal 3:13, 28, 5:1).

The Bible teaches that God has revealed Himself in the totality of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God (Matt 5:18; John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted holistically and thematically. We also recognize the necessity of making a distinction between inspiration and interpretation: inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture.

At the end of the document, they restated their position:

We believe that biblical equality as reflected in this document is true to Scripture.

We stand united in our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating Word that provides the most effective way for women and men to exercise the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit and thus to serve God.

In 2004 the first edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, was published by IVP Academic, followed by a second edition in 2005. The book contains 29 articles written by scholars, who support the position taken by CBE. The General Editors were Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis. The authors explain what CBE believes and why.

4) Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) – The CBMW was organized in 1987. Its origin lies in a talk on “Manhood and Womanhood in Biblical and Theological Perspectives,” which Wayne Grudem gave at the 1986 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). In it he invited delegates to join “a new organization dedicated to upholding both equality and differences between men and women in marriage and the church.” In a December 1987 meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts, “The Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood” was finalized. It was first published in its final form by CBMW in November 1988. A full-page advertisement containing the Statement was published in *Christianity Today* in January 1989.

The first edition of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* was published by Crossway Books in 1991. The second edition with a new preface was published in 2006. This book was edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem and contains 26 articles written by scholars who support the position taken by CBMW. They explain what CBMW believes and why. It is interesting that the Danvers Statement was published before the CBE Statement on “Men, Women, and Biblical Equality” and *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* was published 13 years before the CBE book on *Discovering Biblical Equality*.

2. Examining the Position of CBMW

1) The last article in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, written by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, is entitled “Charity, Clarity and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ.” In it they describe members of Christians for Biblical Equality as “theologically conservative, evangelical feminists.” They go on to describe what the two organizations have in common,

In profound ways we share a common passion with the members of CBE: a passion to be obedient to Biblical truth about manhood and womanhood; a passion to see men and women affirm the awesome reality of equal personhood in the image of God; a passion to see marriages whole and lasting and freeing and happy for both husband and wife; the passion to resist the moral collapse of our culture in all manner of tolerated abuses and addictions and perversions; a passion to be a winsome countercultural outcropping of kingdom beauty and truth; a passion to equip all men and women for ministry according to their gifts, with none throwing life away in trivial pursuits; a passion to magnify Christ – crucified, risen and reigning to a perishing society; and a passion to mobilize the whole church – men and women – to complete the great commission, penetrate all the unreached peoples of the world and hasten the day of God. (p. 404)

They then admit that CBMW has a “profoundly different interpretation of how God intends to fulfill this vision,” and add why:

The point is this: We do not love controversy; we love peace. We love our brothers and sisters who belong to Christians for Biblical Equality. We long for a common mind for the cause of Christ. But we are bound by our conscience and by the Word of God, for this very cause, to try to persuade the church that the vision of manhood and womanhood presented in this book is true and beautiful. It is a precious gift of God to the church and to the world. (p. 406)

2) Issues on Which CBMW and CBE Differ – Based on the Danvers Statement (DS)

Issue 1 – Different Roles for Men and Women in the Church

The following are the DS Affirmations related to this issue:

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).*

4. *The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).*

○ *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.*

6. *Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.*

○ *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).*

8. *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.*

Response to the Issue 1 – Different Roles for Men and Women in the Church

1) Evaluating the Role Model - The word “role” is not a biblical term. It is not used anywhere in the most popular translations of the Bible, such as the KJV, the NIV, the NRSV, the ESV, the CEV, and the GNT. One exception is the NLT, where it is used once in Joshua 18:7, “The Levites, however, will not receive any allotment of land. Their **role** as priests of the Lord is their allotment.” The word “function” is related in meaning to “role.” In the NIV, the NLT, the NRSV, the GNT, and the ESV, it is used once in the New Testament and that is in Romans 12:4. The whole passage (Romans 12:3-8) in which this word occurs is very instructive. First, it warns Christians not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Second, it tells us that we have differing functions within the body of Christ. Third, it tells us that we have been given different gifts, which we should use to build up the body of Christ. This all fits with ASBE’s position that God’s gifting and calling should determine our function in the church rather than our gender or our personal wishes.

2) Understanding the Terms We Use – We need to be aware of what the terms “sex” and “gender,” “male” and “female,” “masculine” and “feminine,” mean in modern usage. The World Health Organization states the meaning and usage of these terms clearly and succinctly:

“**Sex**” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

“**Gender**” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. To put it another way: **"Male" and "female" are sex categories, while "masculine" and "feminine" are gender categories.**

Aspects of sex will not vary substantially between different human societies, while aspects of gender may vary greatly. (<http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/>)

The terms “masculinity” and “femininity,” as well as “masculine” and “feminine,” do not appear in the Bible. This tends to bolster the view that that these are social constructs, that are based on what a given society considers appropriate behaviors and activities for men and women. These will vary from culture to culture, and from subculture to subculture within a larger culture.

One of the benefits I received from living and working in India for eleven years was that I saw Canadian culture differently when I returned to Canada. It is not easy to look at one’s own culture critically or to evaluate it in the light of biblical teaching, if one has not lived outside one’s own culture for an extended period of time, and even then one may not be able to do it objectively. The culture and subculture in which we live have a powerful influence on how we think and act. The human authors of the Bible were influenced both by their culture and by their experiences with God. For instance, they lived and wrote in a time when slavery was a widely accepted practice

and when women were not highly valued or respected. Jesus as God incarnate challenged these and other cultural norms of his time by what he taught and how he related to people. This is why we must interpret the Bible in the light of Jesus' teaching and example.

3) Interpreting the Scripture Passages Used in the Above Affirmations

Genesis 2:18 is not about different roles for women and men, but about establishing an equal partnership between them. The word *ezer* is used of God as our helper in 19 of its 22 occurrences in the Old Testament. In the other 3 it is about a ruler being a help to others. There is nothing subordinate in these relationships and neither is there in this verse. The woman will deliver man from his aloneness. She is his strength and partner, not his servant.

In **Genesis 2:21-24** God creates a woman from the man. When the man sees her for the first time, he is excited that he now has a companion, a partner, who is like him. Because of this partnership the man will leave his father and mother and become one with his wife.

1 Corinthians 11:7-9 - In verses 9 and 10 of 1 Cor 11, the Greek preposition *dia* occurs 4 times. The common meaning of *dia* is "because of", or "for the sake of." However, in most translations the two *dia* in verse 9 are translated "for" and read, "The man was not created for the woman, but woman for man." This suggests to some readers that the man was not created to serve the woman, but the woman to serve the man. If we use "because of" rather than "for," this confusion is not as likely to happen. The woman was made because of the needs of the man, to complete him, to fill the void in his life, and to make it possible for him to have children.

1 Timothy 2:12-14 is about women being properly instructed in biblical truth before they teach others. Some women in Ephesus had been deceived by false teachers and were trying to pass this teaching on to others, both men and women. Paul's solution to this situation was that women should listen and learn in full submission. It is significant that in the Greek text in these two verses the only verb in the imperative tense, which indicates a command or order, is the verb "learn." Some argue that the full submission is to men, but the text does not say this. I believe the submission is to God and his Word. The women should have a teachable spirit, not disputing or ridiculing their teachers, but with full intent to obey the truth of God (2:11). In this passage Paul is addressing the problem of false teaching in the Ephesian churches, rather than laying down a rule for all time against women teaching and preaching.

1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 – If Paul had wanted to state that women should be excluded from preaching, teaching, and other positions of authority in the church, he would have done so in these two passages, where he lists the requirements for overseers and deacons. Unfortunately, most English translation insert masculine pronouns in these passages, implying that church leaders must be male. However, in the original Greek there is not one masculine pronoun or "men only" requirement for the office of overseers and deacon in these passages.

Philip B. Payne, in footnote 1 on page 445 of his book *Men and Women, One in Christ*, states

The NIV and NAB insert 14 masculine pronouns into 3:1-12, the JB 13, the RSV 10, the NRSV 9, and the NASB 9, which also inserts "if any man" into 1 Tim 3:1, where there is no word for "men" in the Greek of 1 Tim 3:8. In 1 Tim 3:1-12 the NAB and the NEB also add "man" or "men" four times, the JB three times, the RSV once. Only the CEV is faithful to the Greek in not adding a single masculine pronoun, "man" or "men" to either 1 Tim 3:1-12 or Titus 1:5-9.

Some maintain that the "one woman man" phrase in 1 Tim 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6 excludes women from leadership roles in the church. Most scholars understand this phrase as an exclusionary phrase, excluding polygamists and probably also adulterers from leadership in the church. If so,

some ask why Paul also did not use a “one man woman” phrase. One answer is that polygamy was much more common than polyandry in those days. As a result husbands were seen as more likely to be sexually unfaithful than their wives. Or perhaps Paul assumed that “a one woman man” exclusion also implies “a one man woman” exclusion. This is what the CEV implies when it translates it as “be faithful in marriage,” which covers both husbands and wives in leadership.

Issue 2 – Male Headship in the Home and in the Church

The following are the DS Affirmations related to this issue:

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).*

○ *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.*

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.*

○ *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).*

7. *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).*

Response to Issue 2 – Male Headship in the Home and in the Church

1) Response to Affirmation 3 - As has already been stated in the discussion of Genesis 2:18 under Issue 1, we do not find male headship in Genesis 1 and 2, but rather an equal partnership between the man and the woman. They were both created in the image of God. They were both given the responsibility to care for the earth and all its living creatures. The woman was not created to serve the man but because the man needed a partner that would complement him.

2) Response to Affirmations 4, 5, and 6 – We agree that the fall brought distortions into the relationships between men and women. However, we do not agree that both the Old and New Testaments affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community. The word “headship” does not occur in the Bible, but the word “head” does. The Greek word for head is *kephalé*. It usually means the head of a person or an animal. However, in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians Paul uses *kephalé* eleven times in a metaphorical sense. Translating *kephalé* as “head” in these places is misleading to English speakers because when we see “head,” our minds go immediately to ideas like “having authority over” or “being in subordination to.” But is headship what Paul is talking about in these verses? There are good reasons to believe that in most, if not all, of these eleven instances, *kephalé* should be translated as “source” rather than

“head.” In the Septuagint (LXX) the translators used *kephalé* in 226 of 239 instances to translate “head,” where it literally means head of a person or animal, but only in 6 of 171 instances did they use *kephalé* where head clearly means leader. The most common meaning of *kephalé*, when it is used metaphorically in the Greek of New Testament times, is “source”, not “authority.”

Let us apply this insight to 1 Corinthians 11:3, a key verse for complementarians. In this verse Paul is giving the theological basis for his teaching about men and women leading in worship (11:4-16). He writes, “I want you to realize that the source of every man is Christ, and the source of woman is the man, and the source of Christ is God.” This translation explains the order of the three clauses: 1) In creation, Christ is the source of man; 2) In Genesis 2:21-22, man is the source of woman; and 3) In the incarnation, God is the source of Christ. The clauses are chronologically ordered.

Let us also apply this insight to Ephesians 5:21-24, another key verse for complementarians. First, let us note that verse 22 is closely tied to verse 21. In fact, the word “submit” does not occur in the Greek text of verse 22. It is borrowed from verse 21. Literally translated, verses 21 and 22, would read, “Submit to one another out of reference to Christ, wives to their husbands as to the Lord.” Second, let us translate *kephalé* as source in verse 23. “For the man is the source of the woman as Christ is the source of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” Here we need to note two things. First, the first clause is the same as the second clause in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Second, how the second clause fits with Ephesians 4:15-16, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the **source**, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work,” and with Colossians 2:19 which says Christ is “the **source** from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” These verses remind us of John 15, where Jesus says that he is the true vine, the source of our spiritual life and growth. Without a living connection with him, we can do nothing. Verse 5: 23 should cause us to rethink our relationship to Christ. It is not a ruler-subject, master-servant relationship. We submit to Christ in awe of and response to his self-giving, redemptive, life-giving, and life-sustaining love. Our submission to one another should be modeled after the relationship between Christ and his church. He serves the church and we serve him. The wife’s side of the relationship is described in 5:22-24 and the husband’s in 5:25-33. These are the two sides of mutual submission.

3) A Concluding Thought on the Interpretation of Scriptures

Dr. Philip Payne in a recent letter reminded me that evangelical scholars, both egalitarians and complementarians, tend to use the same hermeneutical principles in interpreting the Bible. However, when complementarian scholars come to “pivotal texts about women that undermine their hierarchical world view they tend to ignore the principles they use to interpret other issues in the Bible. They dismiss careful word studies, grammatical analysis, the flow of the argument, the historical context, the cultural setting, and the original purpose of the author if it challenges their paradigm.” For instance, they refuse to consider the possibility that *kephalé*, used metaphorically, can mean “source,” or to ask why most translations insert masculine pronouns and the words “men” and “man” in 1 Tim 3:1-12 that are not in the Greek text. Could it be that having abandoned the traditional belief that women are inferior to men, they are now trying to hang on to the concept of male headship?

Rev. Hugh McNally, June 1, 2013