

Healthy church 5: Serving the church as men and as women

This seminar was taught to a group of men at Immanuel. An equivalent seminar was taught simultaneously by one of our female pastors to a group of women from the congregation.

Introduction

What difference does it make that I'm a man, and not a woman? What difference does it make to the church that I'm to serve Christ and the His body as a man (and not as a woman).

As we talk today about Biblical manhood and womanhood we're dealing with something very *personal*, we're trying to shake off unhelpful *stereotypes and sins* (both within church and within the culture), and we're living in a time of extraordinary *change* (feminism, homosexuality, gender fluidity, etc.). Here are some basic convictions to guide us:

- We believe **the Bible** to be entirely good and true. When Scripture is clear, we must to be clear. Where it doesn't answer all our specific questions we will want to be more guarded. We want to be charitable with those who disagree with our understandings of the Bible. And we need to be honest that we all fall short of the standards of God's Word. We need forgiveness from Christ (perfect God and perfect man), and the power of God's Word and Spirit to reform us.
- **Discipleship and godliness** has much in common for men and for women in the church. We're called to follow Christ more closely - whoever we are.
- But **being a man or a woman is a gift from God**. We do display the fruits of the Spirit as either male Christians or female Christians. This is a gift that includes the sex of our bodies, certain dispositions (which we're to cultivate), and certain roles which we're to fulfil.
- Biblical manhood/womanhood **is relevant for ALL of us in EVERY stage of life** whether we're young/old, single/married, worker/boss, church member/elder. There will be implications for ALL of us, and for every part of life. The applications of these principles may look different according to the relationships and stewardships that God has given each of us.
- To the extent that we understand and live out God's plan for Christian/men women we will contribute greatly to the health, unity and effectiveness of our local church (as well as to all other relationships which the Lord gives to us).

1. A biblical theology of gender

(a) Men and women are equal

They are of the same value. Neither one is better or worse.

- **equal in God's creation**

Genesis 1:26-27, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

It is not just men or women who are made in the image of God or given responsibility to rule the creation as God's appointed governors. This position of dignity is given to both men AND women: "in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

- **equal in God's salvation:**

The Bible is full of brilliant women too – in the saved family of God! In the Old Testament we read of Miriam (Ex 15:19-21, cf. Micah 6:4), Deborah and Jael – remember the tent peg! (Judges 4-5), Huldah (2

Kings 22), Naomi and Ruth, Esther, and the wife of noble character from Proverbs 31, whose role encompasses the home, manufacture and teaching.

In the New Testament there's Paul's list of co-workers in Romans 16. There are Jews and Greeks, men and women who served together with Paul in the cause of the gospel. The apostle is evidently *not* a misogynist as is sometimes claimed. Here we read of Phoebe (who was a servant or deacon of the church – probably set apart for this particular work), of Priscilla, Mary, Tryphosa and many others.¹

And consider Jesus' own life and ministry. Whilst he did not appoint female apostles he did demonstrate an utterly revolutionary attitude to women. He treated women with respect and love, including them in his inner circle. The contrast with the attitudes of first century Judaism is vast. Jewish men traditionally thanked God daily that they were not women (or Gentile dogs); a rabbi would never speak to a woman on her own. But Jesus treated them as equals. The apostle Paul explains why in Galatians 3:

Galatians 3:26-28, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Every Christian – be they Jew, Gentile, slave, free, man or woman – has the same status. All are "sons" of God, in union with Christ Jesus (v26). This means that all are inheritors of the great blessing of salvation (for the "son" was the heir of the father's blessing). A Christian man is no more a son of God than is a Christian woman! (And, don't forget, men and women together make up the "bride" of Christ, the church!)

Further, men and women are in equal possession of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. The Spirit is poured out on God's "sons and daughters." (Acts 2:17-18). The Spirit's gifts are given "to each one" for the common good. (1 Cor 12:7). In the NT we read of both men and women praying (1 Cor. 11:5, Acts 1:12-14) and engaging in prophecy (Acts 21:9, 1 Cor. 11:5) and serving sacrificially (1 Tim 5:9-10). Furthermore we read of women teaching (Acts 18:24-28, 2 Tim 1:5, 3:14-15, Titus 2:3-4) - evidently, some women as well as some men receive the gift of teaching - they are no less able or gifted by God than men, and are called to exercise those gifts in appropriate ways for the good of the body.

Simply, the healthy church needs godly needs godly women and men – for her unity, health, effectiveness.

(b) Men and women are different

- **"Egalitarianism"**

For years it has been the accepted position of our society that men and women are essentially the same (apart from biological differences). Any other differences are said by many to be purely cultural and imposed by a patriarchal society. There is no distinction between men and women either essentially or in roles. This position is often termed *egalitarianism*.

- **"Complementarianism"**

It is our conviction that the Bible teaches us something different about our humanity. Namely that God has built men and women different, such that we relate in an "ordered" relationship. We're not simply "people" who happen to have male or female reproductive organs. Our maleness or femaleness is not just a thin veneer spread over our bodies. It is fundamental to us. God has made us male or female. And we relate together in an ordered way.

¹ What of "Junia" in Rom. 16:7? Is she a woman who is to be counted among the apostles, as the NIV translation suggests? Firstly, it is ambiguous as to whether or not the name is that of a man or a woman. Secondly, the Greek preposition could be translated either "to" the apostles or "among" the apostles; the former translation would give a rendering like that of the ESV ("well-known to the apostles"). Thirdly, the term "apostle" has a range of meaning, indicating not only a conduit for authoritative revelation from God, but also a "messenger" or missionary sent out by a church. Nonetheless, Junia(s) was evidently a highly significant individual.

This viewpoint is sometimes known as *complementarianism* – meaning that men and women are equal, but different and complementary. We’re going to see that men and women are distinct in disposition and distinct in certain roles.

Complementarianism is the conviction of all the elders of our church and of our church council. But wherever we feel we’re at today, we have *all* got things to learn, Scripture to wrestle with, questions to ask, and obedience prayerfully to pursue. Maybe some of us are egalitarian. Others of us realise that we’re theoretical complementarians, but functionally/practically behave like egalitarians. Maybe were ignorant... or lazy... or know that we have smuggled sin into our hearts and relationships under the guise of complementarianism. Forgiveness and repentance is always available, by the grace of God!

- **Gender difference in the Bible**

We see this difference in Genesis 1 and 2 – in the created order, even before the fall. And we see it in the NT as Jesus and the Apostles explain how God made us and what difference it makes.

Genesis 2:18-25, “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

Notice the differences between men and women, in the details of their *creation* and in the *roles* which the Lord gives to them:

In Genesis we see that man is given authority to name the animals. And that he names Eve.

The apostle Paul will say – commenting on Gen 2 that...

- the woman is created “for” man, 1 Cor. 11:9 (Gen 2:18)
- the woman is created “from” man. Her name, “woman,” refers to the man from which she was made, [Hebrew: *ish / ishah*] 1 Cor 11:8 (Gen 2:22)
- The woman is created “after” man. 1 Tim. 2:13 (Gen 2:22)

The man is charged to work the ground and keep God’s dwelling place (see Genesis 2:15; more on this below). Woman is wonderfully described as a “helper fit” for the man.

See how this paints for us a glorious (though now sin stained) picture of a Godlike and ordered relationship.

- **An ordered relationship: head and helper**

In Genesis 2:18 we read: “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him”.”

We learn that a woman is “suitable” for a man. The Hebrew word lying behind this English translation literally means “like-opposite.” The woman is *like* a man – she’s a human being like him. But she is *opposite* – she is not the same, but corresponds to or complements him. This word speaks beautifully of complementarity.

More than that, Genesis 2:18 explains that a woman is created to be a “helper.” Part of the DNA of a woman is to be a co-equal and complementary helper.

In the Bible, the word helper doesn't mean weakness. It means having resources the other person doesn't have. God is described as the helper of Israel – he can do things they can't. (For the Lord as our "helper" see Psalm 30:10, 54:4, 1 Samuel 7:12). Someone put it like this: to be a helper in the Bible is not to be weaker, but to be a completer. Genesis shows us why this is true of women: we read that it is "not good for the man to be alone." He is incomplete. So God creates woman.

And Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 11 that this is an "ordered" complementarity. He writes: 1 Corinthians 11:3, "Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

Paul tells us that the idea of order in relationship goes back beyond Creation. It reflects something within the Trinity – the way Christ relates to God. (That should encourage us if we find the idea of "order" hard. It is a God-like thing).

In human society women the essence of womanhood can be described as "helper." Part of what it means to be a man is to be a Christlike "head." It's a Biblical word with a clear connotation of authority (note: it doesn't ever mean "source" as some have claimed, like the source or head of a river).

That's why the reference to the Trinity is so helpful: God's Son is 100% God. But he is eternally begotten of the Father, the Son who is forever the obedient and submissive son of the Father.

We'll apply this in a minute. But note that "equal-but-different" is rooted in creation. The idea of "head" and "helper" is not a consequence of the fall.

But sin does screw us up. And Jesus is the only perfect man, the only sinless head.

And yet the Lord loves to see loving, costly, and Christ-like men – who serve like Jesus did. And he loves to see Christ-like women, choosing (not coerced) to be a helper and using her strength in such a way that complements and doesn't compete with men as together we serve Christ.

2. What is the masculinity to which Christian men should prayerfully aspire?

(a) Be careful and clear!

First, the Bible doesn't spend much time saying "be masculine, not feminine." It assumes this much. More, it emphasises the distinction between manhood and boyhood, and encourages us to be mature.

Second, we need to know that some would want to say, "Is there REALLY a vision for masculinity to which male humans should even aspire?" Gender and masculinity is highly controversial territory.

Third, as men we have much to repent of: perhaps promiscuity, or passivity that means we spend hours sitting in front of video games, or even abuse and neglect. We need to own up to sin and guilt; repent of sin; trust in the perfect man, Jesus; and get listening to his word.

But we're also to have confidence in God's good vision for Biblical manhood and womanhood. The relationship between men and women is:

- Not a PARADE: one in front, one behind (like the Hindu couple I used to see walking down the road, the husband always 20 yards in front of his wife);
- Not a RACE: where one wants to win and beat the other;
- But a DANCE: we are meant to be as one... together... needing and depending on each other... to serve and glorify Christ in every area of life.

We're going to see that God has made men and women to be **** distinct in disposition and distinct in certain roles ****. Of course, we are all unique (different characters, strengths and weaknesses, natural abilities etc). And the Bible is surprisingly non-descriptive of what men and women are to be and do. Nevertheless...

- it IS possible to *describe* what God made men and women to be like. There are certain traits, inclinations and dispositions in ALL men... to be embraced and applied with wisdom BY all men EVERYWHERE in ALL situations... with sensitivity to one's culture, sphere and setting.
- And the Bible then *prescribes* distinct roles for men and women to play in the family and in the church, that flow out of that God-given disposition.

(b) A distinct disposition

Some of us are into poetry... others into car maintenance. Different places and times have **WRONGLY** located true manhood in such activities. (Some of the stuff taught about biblical manhood – e.g. you've got to be into axe throwing to be a real man etc – is truly dumb!)

However, the Bible does give us what we might call a distinct DISPOSITION which ought to be present in all men – in all times, places, life settings, relationships. We're going to draw observations from Genesis.

- **Be a man who wants to help godly order**

There is a clear link between the name of the first man ("ADAM") and the ground ("ADAMAH"). You can see that link if you skim through Genesis 2:5,7,9,15,19 (*and* the curse in 3:17-19).

Responsibility for the "ground" – i.e. to obey God's command to rule and bring order – is particularly given to the man.

So what? There's a particular responsibility for a man to be a bringer of godly order. It's not something that can be done *without* women. But it's a particularly male disposition and calling.

- **Be a man who tends and nourishes**

Genesis 2:15, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work** it and keep it."

That word for "work" also means "serve/cultivate/tend/labour." This was man's role in the Garden, and after the Fall (Gen. 3:23). Whatever garden the Lord has given us, we are invest in it our time, energy, care.

This is true of work (whatever it is we do) – seeking to make the world a more orderly place. And it's true of people and relationships too. Consider Ephesians 5 where husbands are called to nourish their wives; and Ephesians 6 where fathers are called to the Christian nurture of their children.

It is simply not the case that women are the main nurturers, and men are strong and silent types! We are called to be cultivators, to tend and nourish – not just tasks, but people and relationships. That's got implications for marriages, child-rearing, *and* for all our relationships within the body of Christ. (Just think what a difference it would make if every Christian man considered, "How can I tend or nurture people within my sphere of influence?").

- **Be a man who seeks to keep and protect**

Genesis 2:15, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and **keep** it."

That word for "keep" also means "guard/protect/take care of/watch over." It was used of soldiers, shepherds, priests and even God himself. It implies protection. (Note: when Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, the angel is tasked to "guard" the way to the tree of life – same Hebrew word – since Adam had failed at his job).

Physical and spiritual protection is part of being a man. (Perhaps this is one reason why elders are male – since they are called to guard the flock from error).

So, bringing ORDER and TENDING and PROTECTING ought to be written through every single part of our lives. Out of which flows distinct roles in two key areas...

(c) **Distinct roles**

We're not going to spend long on marriage and church leadership. Possibly these texts are fairly familiar to many of us.

There are two key relationships – and those which are the most covenantal (i.e. where, in God's economy, the HEAD affects those in union with him) – in which distinct roles are prescribed and men are called to serve as a Christ-like head.

Please note it's NOT that men have authority over ALL women. These are specific commands made of husbands in marriages and elders within churches. Though it won't be a surprise if that "disposition" we've talked about does show through in other places as godly men seek to be responsible and to serve.

- **Marriage.**

Please look on another occasion at Ephesians 5:21-33.

- **Church leadership.**

Please look on another occasion at 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 14:26-40, 1 Timothy 2:11-15

- **General observations.**

Here are a few general observations to help us think about being a husband or being an elder or church leader (drawn mainly from CHBC's excellent core seminar series on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood). What does it mean to be men who lead?

First, Biblical masculinity expresses itself NOT in the demand to be served (and to get one's own way), but in the strength to serve and sacrifice for the good of others.

Second, Biblical masculinity doesn't have to initiate every action. But it does feel the responsibility to provide a general pattern of initiative.

Third, Biblical masculinity accepts the burden of the final say in disagreements between leader and led, but doesn't presume to use it in every instance.

Fourth, the Biblical call to leadership is a call to repentance and humility. We need God's forgiveness (granted through Christ, the second Adam), and the power and wisdom that come only from His word.

That's the leadership that Christ models and commands.

(See below: a helpful reflection on leadership as service).

Appendix: Biblical authority is not about personal advantage but SERVICE

A helpful reflection from Mark Dever's "Discipleship":

"Too often, people today don't understand what a gift godly authority can be. Raising up leaders requires us to teach about godly authority, and encourage it. Jesus certainly taught his disciples about a right use of authority ([Matt. 20:25–27](#)).

"The fallen world both misuses authority and lies about authority well used. Satan's basic lie to Adam and Eve was that God couldn't really love them and tell them no.

"When people are skittish over complementarianism, apologizing for it, I know they are probably thinking about authority in a wrong way. It's as if they think authority is only an advantage for the person who possesses it. Apparently they haven't had children! Authority looks like an advantage only to someone who doesn't have it. When you have the authority, pretty much all the "advantages" seem to vanish, and you begin to realize how much of it is service—a glorious service, but a service.

"This became clear to me years ago when I was preaching through 2 Samuel. David's "last words" are striking: "When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth" (23:3–4). Good authority blesses those under it. It nourishes them. People will gravitate toward good healthy authority that spends itself for the good of those under its care, rather than using them for its own good. Look at how a family prospers under good parents, or a team under a good coach.

"That's why the abuse of authority by pastors is such a terribly destructive and blasphemous sin. Furthermore, the stories of prosperity preachers buying private jets for tens of millions of dollars point to something incredibly twisted and Satanic. Such "pastors" play right into the lie that Satan hissed into Adam and Eve's ear in the garden of Eden: that authority is just a way to abuse you for the leader's benefit.

"Gratefully, the King on the cross shows us that the opposite is true for godly authority.

"Just as Jesus tutored his disciples in the godly use of authority, so must we with any men whom we are raising up in leadership. And pastors must model such authority."