

Complementarianism: A Doctrinal Perspective

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

1. The complementarian position affirms the equality of men and women as God's image bearers

"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" (Genesis 1:26-27).

"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" (Galatians 3:26-28).

"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 3:7).

2. The complementarian position values the significant role women play in the ministry and life of the church

- Numerous examples in the Old Testament
- New Testament examples include:
 - The women in Jesus' ministry (especially in Luke)
 - Women in the Book of Acts (Dorcas 9:36, Lydia 16:11-15, etc.)
 - Romans 16 (The majority of names on Paul's list of thanks were women, and see especially Phoebe v.1)

3. The complementarian position maintains that there are functional/complementary differences between men and women

"Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:18-23).

"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 11:2).

"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 14:3-35).

"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. 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. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:22-33).

"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).

A Brief Overview of 1 Timothy 2:11-15

V.11 – *"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness."*

- Some see the emphasis here on 'learn'. The idea being that the woman needed to learn first before being able to teach.
- But, note the pattern of 2:8-9. The emphasis is not on praying, but a particular manner of praying – "without anger or quarrelling." The emphasis is not on dressing, but a particular kind of dressing – "modestly".
- "Please drive carefully."
- Quiet means peaceable and non-argumentative (see 1 Tim 2:1-2)

V.12 – *"I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."*

- When Paul says, "I do not permit," it does not mean that he is just offering his opinion
- Paul uses this type of language repeatedly throughout his letters (Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1, 20; 12:1 etc.)
- Paul's words here contain every bit as much of his apostolic authority as everything else he says
- Paul's restriction here is aimed at a particular type of teaching. "Teach or exercise authority" does not refer to two ideas, but one (i.e. 'nice and warm').
- Paul is addressing authoritative teaching – the kind exercised by elders in the context of the church (1 Tim 3:14-15).
- There are examples of women teaching in the New Testament (Acts 18:24-28; Titus 2:3-6).
- The type of teaching Paul is speaking about is the type of teaching that is the special domain of elders. This is the chief difference between the qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

VV.13-14 – *“For Adam was formed first, then Eve...”*

- When many people come to a text like this the question they ask is: What possible reason could Paul have for saying this?
- Paul gives his reason plainly here and grounds it in creation
- This establishes an authority/submission structure
- Creation: Adam → Eve
- Fall: Eve → Adam
- Post Fall: Adam → Eve
- “All attempts to get rid of Paul’s teaching on headship (on grounds that it is mistaken, confusing, culture-bound, or culture-specific) must be pronounced unsuccessful. It remains stubbornly there. It is rooted in divine revelation, not human opinion, and in divine creation, not human culture. In essence, therefore, it must be preserved having permanent and universal authority.” (John Stott)

V.15 – *“Yet she will be saved through childbearing.”*

- The reference to “childbearing” is a metonymy – it refers to childbearing and all that it is associated with
- This covers all areas associated with family
- This does not mean that women must bear children to be saved, but that women are to embrace the complementary role and unique calling God has given them

Responses to common objections

1. Isn’t this a cultural command?

- It’s clearly not cultural because Paul appeals to the creation account
- The fact that our culture is at odds with biblical teaching doesn’t negate its truth

2. Doesn’t this treat women like 2nd class citizens?

- A person’s role does not determine his or her value
- There is submission and differentiation of roles within the Trinity

3. Isn’t this a recipe for oppression?

- The abuse of a thing doesn't negate its proper use
- This is more about responsibility than privilege

4. Aren't women given the gift of teaching?

- We are called to use God's gifts according to God's design (1 Corinthians 12-14)

5. Isn't there a double standard when it comes to foreign missionaries?

- We don't judge whether or not something is right on the basis of whether or not it works

Discussion Questions

1. To what degree do you think the church is influenced by the surrounding culture when it comes to making decisions on issues like this one?
2. What experience have you had with the various leadership models in the church?
3. Your being here demonstrates that you take this issue seriously. What is it that makes this an important issue in your mind?