

THE HIGH CALLING OF WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN THE CHURCH

Introduction

From the beginning, God created men and women equally in the image of God (Gen. 1). Thus, from the start, women have inherent value, worth, and dignity as image-bearers of our Creator. Further, women were given the distinct honor of bearing children, thereby making possible the very first command placed on mankind, “Be fruitful and multiply...” (Gen. 1:28).

As Scripture unfolds, women are often held up in the Old Testament as models of virtue, courage, and integrity (consider, among others, such examples as Sarah, Ruth, and Esther). Women are privileged to be included in the genealogical records of our Lord Jesus. And, as the old covenant ends, Mary was chosen and called “favored” (Lk. 1:28) to bear the very Son of God!

In the New Testament Jesus tenderly welcomed women to accompany Him as disciples. Women were allowed to learn at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 10:42), worship Him (Lk. 7:36-50), and even be the first to bear witness to His miraculous resurrection (Mt. 28:1-10). Women were gathered in prayer as they waited for the Holy Spirit to be given at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). The apostle Paul warmly commends specific women (Rom. 16:1-16; Col. 4:15; 2 Tim. 1:5) and describes women in Philippi as co-workers in laboring in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). Finally, salvation is proclaimed freely and indiscriminately to women just as to men (Gal. 3:28).

Thus, we believe the overarching theme of Scripture casts high esteem on the dignity and value of womanhood. Failure to recognize this can lead casual Bible readers to misconstrue the distinctions of men and women to be chauvinistic.

Equal, yet Different

With this context in mind, we acknowledge, however, that God has established distinct roles for men and women in the home and in the church. What follows is a description of why and how we seek to consistently honor women while simultaneously remaining faithful in our application of Scriptural roles to women.

1. **Equal value, yet different genders:** When God created mankind, he said that he created them in his own image; he created them as male and female in his own image. (Gen. 1:27). This doesn't mean that God is male and/or female, for God is Spirit (John 4:24); it means that both men and women portray God's image in Creation. Properly understood, this should cause men and women to value one another equally as image-bearers of God. However, the biblical distinction of men and women remains.

2. **Equal importance, yet different responsibilities:** Men and women are equally important in God's plan for Creation (Gen. 1:28), and they are distinctly important in God's plan for Creation (Gen. 2:15-18). When God created mankind in the general sense, he gave them the mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28). This couldn't be done without both men and women present – men and women are equally important in God's plan for Creation! Nevertheless, God creates the man specifically to work the garden of Eden and keep it (Gen. 2:15), and he creates the woman (out of Adam's rib) specifically to help the man with this (Gen. 1:18-22).
3. **Equal redemption, yet different callings:** Men and women are of equal value in redemption, and of distinct value in redemption. During Pentecost the Spirit fell upon men and women as Joel prophesied (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 1:13-14, Acts 2:1-3), confirming that redemption includes both men and women. Men and women are of equal importance in God's plan of redemption. We see this illustrated, not in God's change of plans for Creation, but in his restoration of Creation. Just as Creation set equal and distinct value upon men and women within the family structure, redemption reiterated that beautiful family structure by explicitly confirming that men are called to provide for their families (1 Tim. 5:8) and women are called to bear children and manage the household (1 Tim. 5:14).
4. **Equal sinners, yet different consequences:** Man and woman are both to blame for the Fall (Gen. 3:16-18), but man and woman have distinct consequences for the Fall (Gen. 3:16-18). When Adam and Eve sinned, they both suffered consequences for their sin. But they suffered consequences in accordance with their roles within Creation. Adam's consequence for his sin was to suffer in the fields (Gen. 3:17-18), while Eve's consequence was to suffer in childbirth (Gen. 3:16). This theme (men working the fields and governing the land; women bearing children and governing the house) is the prevalent lifestyle of God's people in the Bible, not as a result of the curse, but as a result of God's original plan for men and women in Creation.
5. **Equal worth, yet different authority:** While Christian marriage is to involve mutual love and submission between two believers (Eph. 5:21), four passages in the New Testament expressly give to wives the responsibility to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1). This voluntary submission of one equal to another is an expression of love for God and a desire to follow His design as revealed in His Word. It is never pictured as demeaning or in any way diminishing the wife's equality. Rather the husband is called to love his wife sacrificially as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25) and to serve as the leader in a relationship of two equals.

6. **Equal standing, yet different ministry:** From the very beginning, women fulfilled a vital role in the Christian church (Acts 1:12–14; 9:36–42; 16:13–15; 17:1–4, 10–12; 18:1–2, 18, 24–28; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 1:5; 4:19), but not one of leadership. The apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; and leadership in the churches was entrusted to men.

Although the Apostle Paul respected women and worked side by side with them for the furtherance of the gospel (Rom. 16; Phil. 4:3), he appointed no female elders or pastors. In his letters, he urged that men were to be the leaders in the church and that women were not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, although women are spiritual equals with men and the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.

Conclusion

Based on the above, within the context of the local church, we believe and teach that the roles of 1) pastor, 2) elder, 3) deacon, and 4) teacher (in adult audiences where men are present) are reserved for men. We believe this distinction is universal, meaning it applies in all ages and in all settings, including both the local church and the evangelistic missions Bethel supports. Therefore, we require all our pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, and evangelistic mission agencies to affirm this position (whether in theory or in practice) and agree not to teach a position contrary to it.

Men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. However, without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even between the Father and the incarnate Son (1 Cor. 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, women are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer. Only in obedience to Him and His design will women truly be able, in the fullest sense, to give glory to God.