

# **Culture and Theology**

## ***Feminism and Gender Roles***

**April 20, 2024**

## **SEMINAR SCHEDULE**

### **SESSION 1: HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF FEMINISM**

Introduction

Three Waves of Feminism

Philosophical Presuppositions

### **BREAK**

### **SESSION 2: FEMINISM, THE CHURCH, AND THE WORD OF GOD**

Egalitarianism vs. Complementarianism

Complementarianism and the Patriarchy

Concluding Thoughts

### **Q&A**

## INTRODUCTION

“I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.” (Victor Frankenstein, *Frankenstein*)

“I had been the author of unalterable evils, and I lived in daily fear lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness.” (Frankenstein)

Why Frankenstein?

If you love femininity, I think you must hate feminism because feminism is the rejection and utter disdain of femininity. It robs femininity of its distinct glory and goodness. Feminism is inherently misogynistic.

Why does this matter?

A confused culture

The importance of God’s word

*Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

## HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF FEMINISM

“Far too often conservatives want to reject the unsavory fruits of feminism without ever pausing to wonder about the orchard where the fruit was cultivated.” (Rebekah Merkle, *Eve in Exile*)

The fruits of feminism:

- Rampant no-fault divorce
- 60 something million infants murdered
- The rise and prominence of the LGBTQ+ movement
- The ubiquity of cohabitation and premarital sex
- A hermeneutic which subverts God’s word
- The inability to define what distinguishes boy from girl, man from woman
- Women on the front lines of combat
- The death of a household wage

Correlation or causation?

## First-Wave Feminism

1792 “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” by Mary Wollstonecroft

The fight for “equality”

“Feminism is the belief that men and women are fundamentally the same and thus interchangeable.” (Zachary Garris, Masculine Christianity)

The Industrial Revolution: home and work overlapped. Men’s and women’s spheres overlapped.

The American vs. French Revolution

What is equality?

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton

“I forged the thunderbolts, she fired them.” (Stanton)

Three goals of 1<sup>st</sup> wave: abolition of slavery, prohibition of alcohol, woman’s suffrage

Prohibition and suffrage

*But if the men can't drive it out we'll call for women voters;  
They'll scrub out the nation's barber shop with all the whiskey bloaters.  
When we get women voters, good-bye to beer keg toters.  
O-ho! O-ho! When we get women voters.*

Why didn't women want to vote?

What is the smallest unit of society? Individual or household?

“The difference in conclusions between Paul and the feminist movement of today is rooted in a fundamental difference in their points of view relative to the constitution of the human race.”  
(BB Warfield)

Subtle roots of “toxic masculinity”

Female pastors?

7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventism: Ellen Gould White  
Christian Science: Mary Baker Eddy

None of the leading feminist voices were orthodox Christians.

“We have made a fetish of the Bible long enough. The time has come to read it as we do all other books, accepting the good and rejecting the evil it teaches.” (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Women’s Bible*)

Margaret Sanger: Planned Parenthood – abortion, eugenics, forced sterilization

Summary of the first wave of feminism: two goals - 1) the legal disregard of any natural differences between men and women and 2) the release of women from marital subordination.

The Effects of Two World Wars

The bored housewife: stoke the fires of discontent

*problematize* and *normalize*: problematize anything traditional and ordered and normalize the novel and disordered

## Second-Wave Feminism

1963: Betty Friedan published “The Feminine Mystique”

“I think this is a crisis of woman growing up - a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity.” (Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*)

“all branches of feminism are united in the conviction that a woman can find identity and fulfillment only in a career” (F. Carolyn Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility*)

Leading feminist voices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- The housewife is “subordinate, secondary, parasitic” (Simone de Beauvoir)
- “that passive, weak, grasping dependence known as ‘femininity.’” (Betty Friedan)
- “as long as the female is the primary caretaker of childhood, she is prevented from being a free human being” (Kate Millett)
- Housewives “are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps.” (Betty Friedan)
- “as long as the family and the myth of the family and the myth of maternity and the maternal instinct are not destroyed, women will still be oppressed” (Simone de Beauvoir)
- “In a properly organized society, children would largely be taken in charge by the community.” (Simone de Beauvoir)
- “the family is the major roadblock to the full emancipation of women” (Jessie Bernard)

Pro-“choice”?

“No woman should be authorized to stay at home and raise her children...Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.” (Simone de Beauvoir)

“No man should allow himself to support his wife – no matter how much she favors the idea, no matter how many centuries this domestic pattern has existed, no matter how logical the economics of the arrangement may appear, no matter how good it makes him feel...love can flourish between adults only when everyone pays his or her own way.” (Karen DeCrow)

“to have what men have one must be what men are.” (Andrea Dworkin)

Gloria Steinem, founder of Ms. Magazine and outspoken supporter of abortion rights.

a woman needs a man, “like a fish needs a bicycle.”

Another Revolution: The Sexual Revolution

“Whereas pro-life people believe that men and women are inherently different and therefore have different ‘natural’ roles in life, pro-choice people believe that men and women are substantially equal, by which they mean substantially similar. As a result, they see women’s reproductive and family roles not as a ‘natural’ niche but as potential barriers to full equality...[M]otherhood, so long as it is involuntary, is potentially always a low-status, unrewarding role to which women can be banished at any time. Thus...control over reproduction is essential for women to be able to live up to their full human potential.” (Kristin Luke)

The "safe sex" trifecta: abortion, the pill, antibiotics

"No single event since Eve took the apple has been as consequential for relations between the sexes as the arrival of modern contraception." (Mary Eberstadt)

Rebellion against biology itself

Redefinition of marriage: 1969 California

Second-wave and Christianity

Household wages

### Third-Wave Feminism

1<sup>st</sup>: independent from men

2<sup>nd</sup>: act like men

3<sup>rd</sup>: actually be men

Combination of feminism with LGBTQ and other "marginalized groups"

Feminism and other Philosophical Movements

#### *Existentialism*

Jean-Paul Sartre: "existence precedes essence"

"man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards." (Jean Paul Sartre)

Mimetic vs. poietic view of the world

"The tragedy of feminism is that it propagates precisely the opposite of the real interests of women. Instead of helping women to develop their femaleness to its optimum, it tends to encourage them to imitate men." (Werner Neuer)

"It wants an essential and distinct women's voice at the same time that it rejects a biblical origin

"Although the majority of women today reject the label of 'feminist,' many of them, nevertheless, conduct their daily lives exactly according to feminist dogma, accepting as a given what should be the highly controversial and debatable tenets of that dogma." (E. Carolyn Graglia)

## FEMINISM, THE CHURCH, AND THE WORD OF GOD

“Tell me what the world is saying today, and I’ll tell you what the church will be saying in seven years.”

1986: evangelical response to feminism

The Danvers Statement

Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Complementarianism

*Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” (Genesis 2:18)*

Egalitarianism

Christians for Biblical Equality

Theological tension

Is God one or three?

Is Jesus God or man?

Are men and women similar or dissimilar?

Egalitarianism: stresses similarity to the neglect of dissimilarity



## The Egalitarian Argument

1. Both men and women were created in the image of God in Genesis 1:27. *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* (Genesis 1:27)
2. There are numerous examples of faithful women being used by God in both Old and New Testaments: Deborah, Abigail, Hannah, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe, Lydia, Chloe, Nympha, and others.
3. The OT prophesied that men and women would be gifted in the new covenant. *And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.* (Joel 2:28–29)
4. The fact that Galatians 3:28 says that there is neither male nor female in 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 3:28)
5. The fact that it was women who first bore witness to and proclaimed the resurrection in the gospels.

## Presuppositions

headship and submission imply inferiority

Biblical patterns are not prescriptions. They are merely cultural accommodations.

## Complementarianism

1. Every king or priest in the OT and apostle in the NT is male.
2. There are different regulations in the OT to distinguish men and women. For instance, the length of purification, access to the temple, women's vows could be voided by a husband or father, etc. In other words, this seems to be a rather strong pattern throughout the text.
3. The Bible views women ruling over men as an indication of God's judgment. *My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.* (Isaiah 3:12)
4. Scripture views men as being the head of their wives.
  - *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 11:3)
  - *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.* (Ephesians 5:23)
5. Scripture commands wives to submit to their husbands.
  - *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* (Ephesians 5:22)
  - *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* (Colossians 3:18)
  - *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands...* (1 Peter 3:1)
6. Scripture suggests that only men are to be elders.
7. Scripture explicitly restricts certain roles in the church to men.
  - *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. 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 14:33–35)
  - *Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.* (1 Timothy 2:11–15)

## Egalitarian responses to 1 Timothy 2

## Fracturing Complementarity

- Some who would call themselves complementarian simply mean that women can't serve as elders, but they can occasionally preach or teach in church.
- Some would allow women to do the function of an elder as long as they don't have that title. So just call them ministers or directors and not pastors or elders and you'll be fine. The SBC is in the midst of a battle over this very thing.
- Some would allow female deacons, others wouldn't.
- Some are more comfortable with full-time employment outside the home for mothers than others.
- Some think that these restrictions are only to be maintained in the home and church, others think that they have application beyond those contexts.

## Broad, hard, thick, natural complementarian vs. narrow, soft, thin, ideological complementarian

1. Does Scripture prohibit or at least discourage mothers from working outside the home or teaching women's Bible studies or leading worship or teaching in seminary or serving as presidents of denominations and parachurch organizations or teaching mixed-gendered Sunday school or serving politically? In other words, do the role distinctions play out beyond the boundaries of the home and church, and if so, how?
2. What does male headship entail? Is it just a deciding vote & seldomly exercised veto or is it more robust than that?
3. What is the greater danger to the church today, chauvinism and abuse of authority by men or the emasculation and feminization of the church?
4. Are these boundaries and restrictions good and beautiful and to be celebrated or are they a cause of embarrassment?
5. Are the boundaries and restrictions somewhat arbitrary or did God assign distinct roles on the basis of how He wired and created men and women? In other words, should women not serve as elders or lead their homes simply because God says so or did God say so because of creation order and gendered strengths and gifts?

## Patriarchy

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father [pater], from whom every family [patria] in heaven and on earth is named... (Ephesians 3:14–15)*

## The Nature of the Pastoral Office

“What is a blessing in one place is a curse in another. The same impulse that leads a woman to move toward the hurting with comfort and welcome becomes a major liability when it comes to guarding the doctrine and worship of the church. There are times—usually involving grave error or gross sin—when God forbids empathy and pity. When someone—even a close family member—entices Israel to commit idolatry and abandon the Lord, “You shall not yield to him, or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him” (Deuteronomy 13:6-10). So also in the case of first-degree murder, or of bearing false witness in court (Deuteronomy 7:16, 19:13, and 19:21). In such cases, God is adamant that “your eye shall not pity them.”” (Joe Rigney)

“battles are ugly when women fight.” (C.S. Lewis)

“To use a biblical example, when Moses comes down the mountain in Exodus 32 and witnesses the gross idolatry of the Israelites, he says, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.” And the sons of Levi gathered to him. He then tells them to pick up their swords and to go to and fro through the camp, killing their brothers, companions, and neighbors. Their eye was not to pity those who had committed such evil. God’s response to their obedience was to ordain them to the priesthood.

Similarly, in Numbers 25, when the Israelites are confronted with the very first Pride parade, when the Israelite man struts through the camp with his idolatrous Midianite bride, Moses and the elders of Israel weep at the tent of meeting. Phinehas, however, takes action, following the man and woman into their tent and driving his spear through both of them (presumably while in coitus). And God’s response is to say, “That man will make a great priest.”

In other words, the Scriptures teach both by precept and example that God’s ministers—those who serve in God’s sanctuary, must be “jealous with his jealousy” (Numbers 25:12), that is, our zeal for God’s holiness must supersede our natural love for our family and friends and neighbors. The truth of God, the right worship of God, is more precious to us, such that we will not compromise or buckle even in the face of natural affection, even under the influence of pity and empathy.” (Joe Rigney)

## Gendered-Virtue

Just as men and women often sin in different ways, so they pursue virtue in different ways.

“Adam listened to the voice of his wife, and they fell into grave evil. Nabal did not listen to the voice of his wife (Abigail), and he fell into grave evil (1 Sam. 25). A husband is the head, and he can lead his family into ruin (like Adam) or into glory (like Jesus). In a similar way, a wife is the body, and she can influence the head for misery (like Eve) or for good (like the woman in Proverbs 31).”

*The pursuit of virtue will be different for men and for women. Not in every way, but in many, important ways, because God designed our sexual differences to serve distinct purposes, and virtue corresponds to that created purpose. (Michael Clary)*

## Stereotypes and generalities

go with the grain of nature, not against it

“While androgyny advances the feminist cause, it is for the traditional person the ultimate perversion. Because of its essential elimination of what is singularly masculine or feminine, an ideology of androgyny is an attack on the biological constitution of society, a muting of the excitement created by that sexual distinctiveness and complementarity must conducive to satisfying heterosexuality.” (F. Carolyn Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility*)

## Identifying the Greater Cultural Danger

The cobra and the cockroach

Feminism or chauvinism?

“The use of fashions in thought is to distract men from their real dangers. We direct the fashionable outcry of each generation against those vices of which it is in the least danger, and fix its approval on the virtue that is nearest the vice which we are trying to make endemic. The game is to have them all running around with fire extinguishers whenever there’s a flood; and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already nearly gone under.” (C.S. Lewis)

## Disposition Toward Hierarchy and Authority

“I do not believe that God created an egalitarian world. I believe the authority of a parent over child, husband over wife, learned over simple to have been as much a part of the original plan as the authority of man over beast.” (C.S. Lewis)

### A Slippery Slope?

1. willingness to embrace the term complementarian, but to be quick to add, but not THAT kind of complementarian.
2. Before long, that person no longer identifies as complementarian or egalitarian. They are neither, although that position makes no sense at all given that the two options are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of the broad camps.
3. They try that on for a bit until lo and behold they come out as egalitarian.
4. And then sooner or later they almost always progress to affirmation of LGBTQ issues and a host of other progressive concerns.

“The frequent move from egalitarianism to the affirmation and celebration of homosexuality is not so much a slippery slope, but simply what cancer does when left untreated.” (Joe Rigney)  
“Slippery slope arguments can be good ones if the slope is real.” (David Kelley)

### Intuition about Relative Importance

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20)*

*for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27)*

## Concluding Thoughts

1. Femininity is beautiful and glorious, but feminism and effeminacy are gross perversions of God's good design.
2. Feminism is inherently misogynistic. It rebels against God's design for women and tells women that they only have value and worth if they shed a traditional femininity and become more like a man. I can think of nothing more demeaning and patronizing than that.
  - "Feminism has brought about a terrible fear and hatred of everything womanly." (J. Budziszewski)
3. The way to kill feminism is to love femininity. We should celebrate & promote what Scripture says about biblical roles for women. We should normalize marriage, family & domesticity. The way to kill vice is by means of cultivating virtue. The way to defeat feminism is to love femininity and all the glorious contours of the biblical depiction of womanhood.
4. Equality does not mean interchangeability. Men and women are different. Those differences are much deeper than just hair length and bone structure. Those differences are embedded in every single cell of our biology and being. Men can't be women. Fathers can't be mothers. Women can't be pastors.
5. We should be willing to embrace stereotypes and generalities as occasional glimpses into God's good design. The fact that men are generally faster and stronger than women isn't accidental, it is intentional, purposeful. The fact that women and not men carry children in their wombs and nurse them from their breasts isn't arbitrary. Those facts tell us something about how God has created us and what He has created us for. Rather than discarding the generalities, we should understand and appreciate them.
6. We should realize that gender roles are based on a whole lot more than just an isolated proof text here or there. We see these principles throughout the Old and New Testaments. We see it in God revealing Himself as Father and Son and not Mother and Daughter. We see it in God calling Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not the God of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. We see it in the choice of men as priests and kings and apostles and pastors and the fact that only men were called to write inspired Scripture. We see it in commands about older women teaching younger women to love the domestic life, to love their husbands and work at home and raise children. We see it in the husband and wife relationship being compared to Christ and the Church. Far from being a minor thread or whisper, gendered distinction is shouted across Scripture.
7. We should repent if we are embarrassed or ashamed of what God says about gender roles. All of God's commands are true AND good. If we don't find these distinctions to be beautiful & for our good, then we are just recapitulating the original sin of Eve. We're allowing ourselves to be deceived by a voice that oh so subtly suggests that God is a liar & God is not good.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

### Defending against Egalitarianism

- What's the Difference: John Piper
- Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: John Piper and Wayne Grudem
- Man and Woman in Christ: Stephen Clark
- Men and Women in the Church: Kevin DeYoung
- Women in the Church: Andreas Kostenberger and Tom Schreiner

### Assessing and Describing Feminism in General\*

- Eve in Exile: Rebekah Merkle
- You Who: Rachel Jankovic
- The Genesis of Gender: Abigail Favale
- The Feminist Mistake: Mary Kassian
- The Toxic War on Masculinity: Nancy Pearcey
- Domestic Tranquility: F. Carolyn Graglia
- The Essence of Feminism: Kirsten Birkett

\*Not all of these are from an evangelical or even necessarily Christian perspective.

### Defending Strong Complementarianism or Patriarchy

- Its Good to be a Man: Michael Foster and Dominic Tennant
- God's Good Design: Michael Clary
- Masculine Christianity: Zachary Garris
- Federal Husband: Doug Wilson

Blogs:

- Empathy, Feminism and the Church: Joe Rigney
- What is Gendered Virtue: Michael Clary
- Complementarians and the Rise of Second-Wave Evangelical Feminism: Bryan Laughlin and Doug Ponder