

Theological Equipping Class

Gender Roles

October 5, 2025

Sex vs. gender in secular studies:

Sex: biological

Gender: sociological

What are the fundamental differences between men and women and how do those play out in the home, church, and society?

Does equality imply interchangeability?

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

Similarity and dissimilarity

1986/7: 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

Adam (man) from Adamah (ground) – oriented toward and cursed in regards the ground

Ishah (woman) from ish (man) – oriented toward and cursed in regards the family

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 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 do pastors do?

“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)

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

Emergency room triage: broken arm or gunshot wound?

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)

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)
 - "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 for what makes a woman distinct." (Rosaria Butterfield)
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.
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

Complementarianism in General

- What's the Difference: John Piper
- Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: John Piper and Wayne Grudem
- 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 Feminist Mistake: Mary Kassian

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 Garrison
- 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