

MEN AND WOMEN

# EQUAL YET DIFFERENT

A BRIEF STUDY OF THE  
BIBLICAL PASSAGES ON GENDER

Alexander Strauch

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# STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

One of the most significant changes in human history has occurred during the past forty years. It is the gender revolution. In the words of historian William Manchester, “the erasure of distinctions between the sexes is not only the most striking issue of our time, it may be the most profound the race has ever confronted.”<sup>1</sup>

Like the rest of society, Christianity has been permanently affected by this change. According to a leading *Time* magazine article entitled “The Second Reformation,” religious feminists “believe they are caught up in one of Christendom’s great and historic transformations.”<sup>2</sup> In reality, the gender transformation taking place within the worldwide Christian community is not a sign of a “second reformation” (the first being Martin Luther’s back-to-the Bible, sixteenth-century reformation) but of a radical departure from biblical, apostolic Christianity.

Among Bible-believing Christians, the gender revolution has spawned intense, emotional controversy over what the Bible says about the roles of men and women. There are two major viewpoints in this debate. One is the evangelical feminist view (or egalitarian view); the other is the complementarian view, which is the non-feminist view.

The purpose of this book is to state and defend the complementarian viewpoint. Written in outline form, the book presents biblical evidence that Jesus Christ taught that men and women are equal yet different. It introduces the key terms, arguments, and most recent research related to the complementarian position. Thus it also provides an easy-to-read summary of all the key Scripture passages commonly used in the gender debate.

Ninety percent of this book consists of Scripture exposition. I emphasize the Scriptures because the answer to this debate is found in God’s Word, not in books on sociology or anthropology. Furthermore, “no factor is more influential in shaping a [Christian’s] moral and social behavior than regular Bible reading.”<sup>3</sup> Yet biblical illiteracy abounds in alarming proportions among Christians today,<sup>4</sup> and one well-known authority predicts an even greater decline in Bible reading.<sup>5</sup> As the voices of postmodern secular society grow louder and more appealing, it is essential that Christians hear clearly the voice of God through the Word of God in order to counteract secular society’s pervasive influence.

I sincerely pray that you will find the careful exposition of Holy Scripture to be the most rewarding part of this book. The study of God's Word should always be exciting for a Christian. Our Lord loved the Word of God and quoted it with full authority when He faced trials and controversy. As one biblical scholar aptly says of Jesus, our Lord,

We can say with all reverence that Jesus Christ was practically saturated with the Scriptures.... One tenth of His words were taken from the Old Testament. In the Four Gospels 180 of 1,800 verses which report His discourses are either quotations of the written revelation or else direct allusions to it. If we are criticized for constantly quoting Scripture texts, what can be said of Christ, who had them constantly at the tip of His tongue?<sup>6</sup>

This book is written for people who are unfamiliar with the biblical passages on gender and probably will not read a lengthy technical book on the subject (of which there are a bewildering number of choices). It is especially suitable for high school- and college-age young people. It is also an excellent resource for anyone who wants an overview of all the key biblical passages related to the gender debate from the complementarian position.

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**If we are criticized for constantly quoting Scripture texts, what can be said of Christ, who had them constantly at the tip of His tongue? RENÉ PACHE**

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As to the spiritual identity of my readers, I take for granted that they accept the lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives and believe the Bible to be the written Word of God and the Christian's divine, unerring authority for doctrine and life. As the Bible says of itself,

All Scripture is inspired by God [literally, God-breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

# UNDERSTANDING THE CONTROVERSY

Tom, a freshman at a well-known Christian college, stops me after church one Sunday and says, “I’m really confused about the roles of men and women in the church.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Some of my professors say that God made men and women as equals and that traditional gender roles are a myth, a simplistic interpretation of the Bible. Other professors insist that the Bible teaches both equality and gender role differences.”

“Well,” I laugh, “you’ve been introduced to the gender debate. I got thoroughly involved in it during the early ‘70s. Over the years, it has been a personal interest to follow this debate, especially its impact among Bible-believing churches. In fact, the heat keeps rising and the books and articles keep rolling off the presses. It’s a hot one!”

“What should I do?” he asks.

“How concerned are you?” I inquire.

“A lot,” he insists.

“Why?”

“Because I want to know what God wants me to do. I want to know what the Bible says.”

“Good, Tom! I’m glad to hear that you want to know what the Bible, God’s Word, teaches. Let’s get together and study it. I’ll show you why I have come to believe that the Bible teaches that God made men and women as equal yet different.”



The gender debate is not an abstract, impersonal, doctrinal controversy. It touches directly on our humanness, our sexual identity, our ministry opportunities, the marriage relationship, family life, and life in the local church. It raises fundamental issues regarding fairness and justice, the influence of secular culture on Christian thinking, the correct methods for interpreting

God's Word, the leadership of our churches, and our faith in God's Word. It is an emotionally charged controversy that divides churches and denominations worldwide.

As my young friend discovered, no one can hide from this issue. Nor should one try to avoid it. It's too important. The gender debate challenges our thinking and our fundamental beliefs, which is good. Such controversial issues drive serious-minded believers to think more accurately and to study God's Word more diligently.

When I was 18 years old, for example, two Jehovah's Witnesses shook my faith down to bedrock. They challenged my beliefs regarding the deity of Christ. They threw questions at me that I couldn't answer, nor could anyone else I knew. Through prayer, by reading all I could on the subject, and by diligent, conscientious study of Scripture, I finally could answer their questions from the Bible. Their challenge resulted in the strengthening of my faith and the development of my ability to search the Scriptures.

Although the gender debate is not on the same level of doctrinal centrality as is a challenge to the deity of Christ, it is nevertheless a significant issue. It, too, forces us to examine our closely held beliefs and discover what the Bible actually says.

Bible-believing Christians generally hold one of two positions regarding the gender debate. One position is the complementarian view (pronounced, Com ple men TAIR ee un), which is the non-feminist view. It is also called the traditional or hierarchical view. The other position is the evangelical feminist view or egalitarian view (pronounced, EE gal iTAIR ee un). It is also known as biblical feminism, biblical egalitarianism, or biblical equality. Most people who hold the complementarian viewpoint would rather refer to their viewpoint as the biblical one. But since adherents of both sides of the debate claim to hold the biblical view, I will employ the terms *complementarian* and *evangelical feminist* in order to distinguish the two major interpretations.

## **Complementarian View**

The complementarian view teaches that God created men and women as equals with different gender-defined roles. Scholars chose the term *complementarian* in order to emphasize both the equality of the sexes and the complementary differences between men and women. According to this view-

point, God created men and women equally in His divine image. Men and women are fully equal in personhood, dignity, and worth (Genesis 1:26-28). Furthermore, complementarians assert, all believers in Jesus Christ—whether male or female—are baptized, Spirit-gifted, believer-priests and are full members of the Body of Christ. Therefore, they should use their spiritual gifts to their fullest potential and grow in their faith to full spiritual maturity.

According to the complementarian viewpoint, it is equally true that God created men and women to be different and to fulfill distinct gender roles. God designed the man to be husband, father, provider, protector. He is to be head of the family and to lead the church family. God designed the woman to be wife, mother, nurturer. She is to actively help and submit to the man's leadership. God designed these differences at creation. The Bible uses key terms like *head*, *helper*, and *submission* to describe these differences, which are our sovereign Creator's wise design for His image-bearing creation.

To correctly represent the biblical teaching on gender, both truths—equality and role differences—need to be affirmed and held in balanced tension. When properly understood and practiced, these role differences promote godly manhood and womanhood and marvelously enrich family life as well as life in the local church. God is profoundly concerned that gender differences not be minimized or blurred. These differences are fundamental to our sexual identity as male and female and thus need to be better understood and developed according to Scripture.

Adherents of the complementarian view believe that it best represents the plain, literal, straightforward teaching of the Bible on gender. Furthermore, role differences are clearly and repeatedly taught and practiced by Jesus Christ and His apostles. This view also represents the historic interpretation followed by churches and Christian teachers over the past two thousand years, although at times it has been imperfectly understood and implemented.

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Despite God's design for harmonious male-female relationships, the fall of mankind into sin, recorded in Genesis 3, created the battle of the sexes. Sinful men and women have corrupted God's plan for male-female relationships, and the consequences, particularly to women, have been detrimental. Even so, as believers in Jesus Christ, Christian men and women can rediscover, understand, and practice God's design for the sexes.

**A Major Organization Representing the Complementarian View**

The complementarian position is represented by an organization called Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), founded in 1987. Its position paper is the *Danvers Statement*. CBMW also publishes the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. You can obtain more information about this organization and its publications by writing to CBMW, 2825 Lexington Rd., Box 926, Louisville, KY 40280. Web site: [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org)

**Evangelical Feminist View**

Evangelical feminists teach that God created men and women equally to bear the divine image. Furthermore, they conclude that true equality requires equal ministry opportunities for both sexes. They believe that the submission of the woman in marriage and womanly restrictions in Christian ministry are inconsistent with the true picture of biblical equality. They consider the equal-yet-different doctrine taught by complementarians to be a contradiction in terms.

According to the evangelical feminist view, true biblical equality assures that both men and women are full and equal partners in life. The concept of mutual submission and responsibility determines the relationship between men and women in both marriage and the church. Women and men are free to exercise in the church any and all gifts they possess. Men hold no unique, leadership-authority role solely because of their gender. Leadership and teaching in the church is to be determined by spiritual gift and ability, not gender.

This viewpoint recognizes that men and women are not identical. Sexual and other differences between men and women are to be enjoyed, but not exaggerated out of proportion. One's gender does not determine one's status or role in life, nor does it limit spiritual giftedness and ministry opportunities. A woman who is gifted by God to teach and lead the church deserves to have equal opportunity to exercise her giftedness.

Adherents of this viewpoint consider the Bible's statements on headship

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and submission to have been grossly misinterpreted by past generations of Christians. They believe that simplistic, literal, and traditional interpretations of the Scriptures misrepresent the Bible's teaching on gender equality. As a result, women have been discriminated against and their gifts and services have been wasted. Furthermore, they believe that male domination of women is the result of sin entering the world, as recorded in Genesis 3. In their view, Christ's work on the cross restores the original equality of the sexes that is envisioned in Genesis 2 because in Christ "there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28).

**A Major Organization Representing the Evangelical Feminist View**

The evangelical feminist position is represented best by an organization called Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). Its position paper is *Men, Women & Biblical Equality*. You can obtain more information about this organization by writing to CBE, 122 West Franklin Avenue, Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN, 55404. Web site: [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org)

**Jesus Christ and Gender Discrimination**

No one who truly loves people, is sensitive to the Word of God, and is keenly aware of the unspeakable dehumanization that women have suffered (and still suffer) would want to discriminate against women (see summary entitled "War Against Women" at the end of this chapter). To sin against women is to sin against God in whose image women are created.

Why, then, would any intelligent, thinking, sensitive, Bible-believing Christian dare argue for role distinctions between men and women? The answer is simple: Jesus Christ taught that men and women are equal yet different. Although He taught and practiced gender-based role distinctions, Jesus Christ treated all women, even those who were considered to be outcasts of society, with dignity (Luke 7:36-50). He communicated the gospel message to women with love and compassion. In turn, women followed Him and loved Him. They felt free to approach Him.

As Bible-believing Christians, we would never think of accusing Jesus Christ of sin against women or male chauvinism. He alone is absolutely perfect; we are imperfect. He is God in flesh, Truth incarnate. He is the supreme reference point, the final Word. Upon the cross, Jesus suffered for the sins committed by men against women, as well as women's sins against men. He bore these sins in His body on the cross. Thus the gospel provides forgive-

ness and healing for the cruel injustices men and women have committed against one another.

Yet Jesus Christ practiced role distinctions between the sexes by designating male leadership for His Church. In our zeal to right the horrible wrongs that have been committed against women, we must be careful not to violate the truth of God's Word and God's design for the sexes. We must not forget that God created male-female role distinctions in order for the sexes to beautifully complement each other and to exercise different functions in society. His intention for distinct gender roles is good and fair.

Despite God's good intent for gender distinctions, sin has corrupted such distinctions and made them a cause for discrimination and abuse. Secular society's only solution to gender discrimination is to declare complete gender equality. For many in our society, gender equality is an unquestioned assumption—like gravity. Any alternative to equality is incomprehensible to the modern mind. But the teaching of Jesus Christ provides an alternative: God created men and women with equal dignity yet designed them to fulfill different roles. To a Bible-believing Christian, what Jesus Christ says determines what is right and wrong. He defines what is discrimination and what is proper order between the sexes. Secular society does not define these for us.

Jesus Christ has the solution to our gender-confused world. The evils perpetuated against women did not arise from Jesus' teaching or practice. They are the result of sin in the human heart and are part of the larger picture of mankind's sinful inhumanity to mankind. To paraphrase Jesus, evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and gender abuse proceed out of the heart (Mark 7:23).

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## **A Plea**

I want those who are undecided about the Bible's teaching on gender to know that complementarians deeply desire that all women be treated justly and with dignity. We abhor male chauvinistic superiority and the abuse of women. We are aware that some Christian theologians, husbands, and churches have misused the Bible to say degrading things about and to com-

mit crimes against women, for which we are ashamed. But as you will discover through this book, *Christlike love* adds a divine and mutually beneficial character to the role differences between Christian men and women.

I hope you will come to understand that although sinful men and women have misunderstood and abused the doctrine of headship and submission, the doctrine itself is rooted in God's wisdom and love. When it is applied in love, it reflects God's design for the sexes. We complementarians do not hold this viewpoint because we want to maintain archaic, legalistic traditions or male supremacy. Rather, we uphold it because we believe that Jesus Christ taught both gender equality and gender-based role distinctions.

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**What Jesus Christ says determines what is right and wrong. He defines what is discrimination and what is proper order between the sexes. Secular society does not define these for us.**

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Human traditions can blind the minds of even the best people. Jesus Christ Himself was put to death by religious people who placed man-made, legalistic traditions above God's Word. For complementarians, gender is an issue of "thus says the Lord." We believe in role distinctions because the Bible teaches them, and the Bible is the Word of God.

### **War Against Women**

Although in certain countries women have made enormous advancements, "much of the world is still waging war against women."<sup>7</sup> The World Conference on Human Rights (1993) declares that there is a worldwide epidemic of violence against women.<sup>8</sup> When speaking to the General Assembly of the United Nations, Secretary General Kofi Annan said, "Violence against women has become the most pervasive human rights violation, respecting no distinction of geography, culture or wealth."<sup>9</sup>

According to the 1993 United Nation's Human Development Report, "no country treats its women as well as it treats its men."<sup>10</sup> Women throughout the world suffer a greater degree of poverty than men. Two thirds of the world's illiterates are women.<sup>11</sup> In many parts of the world, women are denied basic human rights. They are forced into low-skilled jobs, are underpaid, are overworked, and are discriminated against. Even

in modern, developed societies, divorce leaves women with the primary responsibility to care for the children and usually leaves them in a greater degree of poverty than their estranged husbands.

Sexual assault on young girls, rape, and wife beating are rampant worldwide and remain seriously underreported.<sup>12</sup> In the Philippines, Thailand, and India, the forced prostitution of young girls continues on almost unchecked; there is a growing transnational girl-child slave industry. In India (especially northern India) bride burning continues, and more than nine thousand brides a year are killed by husbands or in-laws who seek a second dowry.<sup>13</sup> In parts of Africa, young girls undergo forced genital mutilation (female circumcision), in part to curb future sexual desire. Furthermore, the worldwide explosion of hard-core pornography degrades all women because it vividly imprints on men's minds that a woman's value is primarily for sex.

In Afghanistan, the repression of women defies belief. Women are denied basic, humane medical care and education. They cannot even go out in public without a male family member and must be completely covered from head to foot. Islamic militants threaten death to any women who speak out against injustice. The situation is so extreme that it has been called "gender apartheid."

The ultimate violence and contempt for women, however, is the practice of female infanticide and sex-selection abortion. Modern technology provides parents in Third World countries such as China and India the ability to detect the sex of a fetus in order to dispose of unwanted baby girls. By choice, males are more numerous in these countries, creating a serious deficiency of wives for men. It is estimated that in South and East Asia, because of infanticide, high maternal mortality, and nutritional and health neglect, "some 100 million women are 'missing.'"<sup>14</sup> Such statistics should cause us to weep. In the words of *Time* magazine, "there are precious few female-friendly spots on earth."<sup>15</sup>

Whether we are egalitarians or complementarians, we can agree that we need to speak out against and work to eliminate such terrible injustices to women.

### Questions for “Statement of Purpose”

1. What are your main questions or concerns regarding the gender debate?
2. Identify the major theme of this book, which the author seeks to prove from Scripture.
3. What do each of the following Scripture texts teach about Jesus Christ’s attitude toward and belief in Holy Scripture?

**Matthew 4:1-11, 5:18,15:3, 4, 6**

**Luke 18:31, 24:25-27, 32, 44**

**John 10:34, 35**

4. What attitude does Acts 17:11 suggest a believer should have toward debatable issues and the use of Scripture?
5. What evidence do you see that “biblical illiteracy abounds in alarming proportions among Christians today”?
6. If biblical illiteracy continues to increase, what may be the consequences to our churches?

### Questions for “Understanding the Controversy”

1. Why is it vitally important for a Bible-believing Christian to thoroughly understand the controversy related to gender roles? In what ways does this debate affect you personally?
2. Where do you go first to find answers to questions concerning gender? Why?
3. What does male chauvinism mean? Use a dictionary to help you answer this question.
4. What does the word egalitarian mean? Use a dictionary to help you answer this question.
5. In one or two sentences summarize the complementarian position.
6. In one or two sentences summarize the evangelical feminist position.
7. Why has evangelical feminism become so popular today among Bible believing Christians? What is its appeal?
8. Do complementarians sinfully discriminate against women because they believe in role differences between men and women? If not, why not?
9. In what ways did the information in the box entitled, “War Against Women,” influence your thinking on gender issues?
10. What new information did you learn from these two sections? How does this information help shape your thinking and actions?

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# I. JESUS CHRIST APPEALED TO THE CREATION ACCOUNT

Let's start studying," Tom says.

"I would love to!" I respond.

"Where do we begin?" he asks.

"We begin where Jesus began."

"Jesus Christ?"

"Yes, Jesus said in John 13:13, 'You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.' We turn to Jesus Christ because He is our Lord and Teacher. He directs our course of study. He shows us where to begin."

"And just where is that?"

"In the Old Testament. Jesus points us back to the original creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, so that is where we start our study."

"How do we know that Jesus begins there?" Tom asks.

"When Jesus was questioned by a delegation of Pharisees about the long-debated issue of divorce, He directed His critics to Genesis 1 and 2. In fact, He quoted Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as the authoritative source of truth. So let's read the account in Matthew 19:3-5."



**19:3** Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"

**19:4** And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

**19:5** and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"

When responding to the Pharisees' male-centered divorce practice, Jesus declared, "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8 NKJV). The Pharisees had failed to understand God's original intention for marriage and the sexes. Hence Jesus told them to go back to the "beginning," back to the Genesis account of creation, back to the Word of God where they would discover

God's normative design for marriage.

The same is true for us today. If we want to understand God's will for the sexes, we must follow Christ's example. When Jesus and His chief representatives, Peter and Paul, wanted to recapture the original design for marriage

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**Jesus Christ, Peter, and Paul affirmed the  
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and gender, they used Genesis, the book of "beginnings." Stephen B. Clark, in his colossal work entitled, *Man and Woman in Christ*, echoes this vitally significant point:

Other New Testament writers, especially Paul, followed Jesus' lead. Most of the important passages on men-women roles in the New Testament refer back either explicitly or implicitly to the first three chapters of Genesis.... It is not possible to understand the New Testament teaching on men and women without understanding how it is founded on the creation of Adam and Eve and on God's purpose as revealed in the creation of the human race.<sup>16</sup>

Since Jesus Christ, Peter, and Paul affirmed the truthfulness of the Genesis record and based their gender teachings on it, we will briefly explore three, essential, bedrock passages: Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:7-25; Genesis 3:1-19.

## **A. Genesis 1: Created Equal in God's Image**

In the ancient world, the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman stands out as truly unique. It is not colored by the pagan, polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East. According to the Genesis narrative, there is only one God who created all things by His Word. He created man and woman uniquely and specifically to bear His image and to represent Him on earth. Moses' declaration of the equality between the sexes was radical for its day: woman, as well as man, bore the stamp of God's divine image. The first man enthusiastically prized and loved the first woman. She was not his property nor was she his slave.

As familiar as they may be, do not rush over these incredibly profound



and theologically significant passages of Scripture. Carefully read the following verses from Genesis 1:

- 1:26** Then God said, “Let Us make man [Hebrew: *’adam*, meaning *man* in the sense of “mankind,” “human race”] in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over...all the earth.”
- 1:27** God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
- 1:28** God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over... every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Note the following observations:

### **1. God created the human race male and female.**

God created two sexually distinct human beings, the male human and the female human. He designed sexuality and called it good. God didn’t have to create separate male and female humans. He could have created female humans with the capacity to reproduce themselves. He didn’t have to make male humans. But God had specific purposes in mind when He created two sexually distinct human beings. One purpose is to teach His people spiritual truths concerning His relationship with them, especially through the one-flesh union of two distinct persons in marriage (see Eph. 5:29-32).

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**The fact that both sexes individually bear God’s  
image demonstrates that they are equal  
in dignity and being.**

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### **2. God created both the man and the woman in His image.**

God stamped His divine image and likeness on both the individual man and the individual woman. Both sexes are image bearers of the one, true God. Nobility, dignity, and eternity mark their faces. They are not like the animals over which they rule.

The fact that both sexes individually bear God’s image demonstrates that they are equal in dignity and being. Both are equally necessary and important to God’s design for the human race.

### 3. God commanded both the man and the woman to multiply and rule the earth.

God crowned the man and woman as king and queen of the earth. He commanded them to multiply and rule the earth. These mandates are based on the facts that both bear equally the divine image; thus they can rule the earth and give birth to others who bear the same divine image. People say, “It’s a man’s world,” but God says it’s His world. He created both men and women as necessary parts of His plan for humans to rule and fill the earth.

### 4. God named the human race “man.”

Verse 26 states, “Let Us make man in Our image.” The word “man” is used here in the sense of “mankind,” or “human race,” not in the sense of male gender. This use of the word *man* is called the generic use.<sup>17</sup> It includes men and women as a class, that is, as human beings.

What is noteworthy is that God chose to use the name of one of the sexes, *man*, to designate the whole race. In Genesis 5:1, 2 this is even more clearly brought out: “This is the book of the generations of Adam [Hebrew: ‘*adam*’]. In the day when God created man [‘*adam*’], He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and *named them Man* [‘*adam*’] in the day when they were created” (italics added). God didn’t use the term *woman* genetically to describe the whole human race. He didn’t say, “Let us make woman in Our image.” Nor did He say, “Let us make mortals in Our image.” He said, “man.”

Raymond Ortlund, Jr., one of the contributors to the classic volume *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, observes that “God’s naming of the race ‘man’ whispers male headship, which Moses will bring forward boldly in chapter two [of Genesis].”<sup>18</sup>

## B. Genesis 2: Created Equal and Different

We now come to Genesis chapter 2, a crucial, decisive passage for our study. It is a battleground chapter. *One cannot understand the gender debate among Bible-believing Christians without grasping its significance.* It is the foundation of the rest of the Bible’s teaching on gender. This is the chapter that is foremost in the minds of Christ and His apostles when they teach on marriage and gender roles. Old Testament commentator Derek Kidner expresses well the critically significant nature of verses 18-25: “The New Testament

draws much of its teaching on the sexes from this crowning paragraph of the chapter, which is the dynamic, or dramatic, counterpart of 1:27, 28.”<sup>19</sup>

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Genesis 2 prepares you for the New Testament material that lies ahead. So read this chapter, meditate on it, and master it. Take special note of the verses below.

- 2:7** Then the LORD God formed man [*ha ’adam*, the male human being, Adam] of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
- 2:15** Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.
- 2:16** The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;
- 2:18** Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”
- 2:19** Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.
- 2:21** So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place.
- 2:22** The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.
- 2:23** The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.”
- 2:24** For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Taken at face value, these verses are scandalous to the ears of most modern secular and religious people. Liberal feminists (religious as well as secular) dismiss Genesis 2 as an ancient myth. They believe it is hopelessly patriarchal and completely irrelevant to twenty-first-century women.

Bible-believing feminists (egalitarians) believe Genesis 2 to be the divinely inspired Word of God. They say, however, that the passage teaches the equality of the sexes only and emphatically deny that Genesis 2 is the foundation passage to the respective headship and subordination roles of men and women.

### **Egalitarian View of Genesis 2**

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, professor of psychology at Eastern College and a leading evangelical feminist scholar, makes this bold assertion, “Nor is there any indication in the creation accounts that the man was to take the lead in this process [dominion of the earth].”<sup>20</sup>

Rebecca Groothuis, an articulate spokesperson for evangelical feminism, adds: “The Genesis creation account *cannot justifiably be used to demonstrate* the existence of male authority and female subordination before the fall. Gender hierarchy *cannot be extracted from the Genesis text* unless it is first smuggled into the text” (italics added).<sup>21</sup>

Gilbert Bilezikian, a former professor of biblical studies and a founding elder at Willow Creek Community Church, writes, “Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God’s creation design [Genesis 1 -2] is to be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the biblical text.”<sup>22</sup>

Genesis 2, however, presents the six vital truths that are essential to our understanding of the New Testament teaching on gender. These truths, outlined below, prepare us for further study.

### **1. God made Adam the central character.**

Jack Cottrell, professor of theology at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, correctly states, “All the action and events revolve around the man.... he occupies center stage. Everything else, including the woman, has a supporting role.”<sup>23</sup> Cottrell goes on to demonstrate this critical point:

The male, not the female, is given the name—the generic name—borne by the human race as a whole: Adam, or Man (2:5; see 1:26 and 5:2). The male is the one to whom God speaks in the narrative (2:16); he is the first to receive divine revelation and instruction. The animals are brought for naming to the male, not the female (2:19,20). The woman is made from

the man, not the man from the woman (2:22). The woman is also made for the man and brought to him, not vice versa (2:18, 22). Afterward it is the man who speaks and makes a theological comment upon the woman's creation, not vice versa (2:23). It is the male who names the female, not vice versa (2:23).

Thus viewed from every possible angle, the whole narrative in Genesis 2 is the story of how God created the man and provided in every way for his well-being.... The other activities recorded in Genesis 2 are all relative to the man's existence, nature, and needs. This includes the creation of the woman. This chapter simply cannot be read in any other way.<sup>24</sup>

## **2. God created Adam first.**

God created the man before He created the woman. Before Eve was formed, God placed Adam in the garden to care for it (2:15). Before Eve was formed, God brought the animals to Adam to be named (2:19). Before Eve was formed, God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest he die (2:16, 17; most likely Adam taught Eve about God's command not to eat from the forbidden tree).

Adam was lord of the earth. Indeed, Adam was the human race, the first human. He represented the human race and it was embodied in him.

The creation priority of the man is not an incidental fact. Adam's prior creation has fundamental significance. We don't have to guess at this significance because the New Testament provides a divinely inspired commentary of Genesis 2. According to the principles of Bible interpretation, the Bible is its own best commentary. Scripture interprets Scripture. Thus, the same God who breathed out the words of Genesis 2 inspired Paul to comment on the true meaning of those words. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul commented on Genesis 2 by writing, "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. *For it was Adam who was first created*" (1 Tim. 2:12, 13a; italics added).

Thus, the New Testament uses the fact of Adam's prior creation to demonstrate that God designed the man to be the primary leader and teacher of the family of God. The leadership model provided in both the Old and New Testaments is that men primarily lead the people of God.

The same model is demonstrated historically on the worldwide level as well. Since the dawn of human civilization men, not women, have primarily ruled society.<sup>25</sup> Is this by chance? Or is it by design? Why are women seeking

liberation and not vice versa? Genesis 2 provides the answer: from the beginning the Creator shaped the human clay in patriarchal form, not matriarchal or egalitarian form. Adam was the first patriarch.<sup>26</sup>

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### **3. God formed the woman *out* of the man.**

God created man and woman in amazingly different ways. God made the man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life (v. 7); God formed the woman out of the side of the man (v. 22). The woman's source of origin was the man. She was fashioned out of Adam's rib (v. 21). The woman's derivation from the man demonstrates not only equality in nature but also demonstrates role differences. How do we know this? The Bible tells us so.

According to the New Testament use of Genesis 2:22, the woman's origin from the man demonstrates the legitimacy of maintaining role differences between Christian men and women. In 1 Corinthians 11:8, Paul, citing

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Genesis 2:22, writes, "For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man." The points he seeks to prove from Genesis 2:22 are that the man "is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man," and also that "the man is the head of a woman" (1 Cor. 11:7, 3). The doctrine of headship and submission is rooted in the Genesis 2 story. The role distinctions Paul insists upon in his letters are based on Genesis 2.

### **4. God created the woman *for* the man.**

If the first three points offend the modern sensibilities of equality, point four is totally unacceptable. Verse 18 reads: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'" God declared that Adam's singleness was not good. So God rectified the

situation. He hand made “a helper suitable for him.” Eve was not another male; she was not a clone of Adam nor was she a twin. She was similar but different.

She had her own biology, physiology, and psychology. She was made to complement the man, to help him populate and rule the earth, and to unite with him as a loving companion-partner. This is the first statement in the Bible concerning the woman’s role; she is to be a help to the man.

#### **A Help to the Man**

The noun “helper” in Genesis 2:18 (Hebrew, *'ezer*) means “help,” “support,” “aid.” It is *the key word used to describe the woman’s role*. This is not a demeaning term. God is frequently described as a “help” to His people (Ps. 121). To be a helper means that the woman has the necessary ability, fitness, resources, and strength to be a help (see Prov. 31:10-31).

The woman was created for the man’s sake, not vice versa (1 Cor. 11:9). Eve was created out of Adam’s side (origin) and for him (goal). As one theologian reminds us: “The man’s role is not defined in terms of the woman’s, but the woman’s in terms of the man’s.”<sup>27</sup> For the Christian man or woman, whatever God calls us to do or be is just, good, holy, and desirable. He is the Creator, and we are the clay. He instituted the leader-helper relationship between the first man and woman.

The Hebrew term for “suitable for him” (Hebrew, *kenegô*) means “like him,” “corresponding-to-him,” “matching him,” “counterpart.” Thus her nature corresponds to his. This shows their equality. She is not like the animals Adam names in verse 19. She, too, is an image bearer of God.

The New Testament commentary on Genesis 2:18 is 1 Corinthians 11:9: “for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.” Again Paul uses Genesis 2 to maintain sexual role distinctions. The fact that the woman was made *for* the sake of the man is proof that the man “is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man,” and also that “the man is the head of a woman” (1 Cor. 11:7, 3).

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#### **5. God gave the man the right to name the woman.**

Before the Fall, Adam named his new companion. When Adam saw her, he said, “she shall be called woman” (Gen. 2:23). This is a generic name, not



a personal name. After the Fall, Adam “called” his wife “Eve,” a personal name (Gen. 3:20).

The one who names a thing or person has the authority and power to name (Gen. 1:5, 8, 10, 2:19, 20). For example, parents have the authority to name their children. The fact that Adam names the woman further suggests Adam’s special authority role within the first couple’s relationship.

## **6. God created the man and woman equal in nature.**

God fashioned a partner for Adam out of his rib. This demonstrates their equality in nature. The man immediately recognized that the woman shared his same nature. So he said, “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23). She was not an inferior creature like the animals he had been busy naming (2:19, 20). She was taken out of his side and thus shared equally in his nature and in the bearing of the image of God.

## **C. Genesis 3: The Fall and the Battle of the Sexes**

In Genesis 3, the man and woman sin against God. They disobey God’s command and eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Their disobedience and its resulting judgment is called the Fall. Genesis 3 “explains why men and women labor in toil, agony, and conflict all their days and why they die. Sin has wrought this dilemma, and nothing short of the removal of sin will end it.”<sup>28</sup> All parties in the gender debate agree that the Fall changed male-female relations for the worse. Let us read the Genesis account of this event.

- 3:1** Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”
- 3:6** When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.
- 3:9** Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”
- 3:16** To the Woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.”



**3:17** Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.”

**3:19** “By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”

Evangelical feminists insist that Genesis 3 is the first historical introduction of the concept of headship and submission. Genesis 2, they argue, teaches the full equality of the sexes, not headship and submission. A leading feminist spokesperson remarks, “It is only the result of the Fall (Genesis 3:16ff) that the woman becomes subordinate to man. There is not even a hint in the narrative of Genesis that woman is in any way subordinate to man prior to the Fall.”<sup>29</sup>

Complementarians disagree. They insist that the concept is introduced in Genesis 2, as we have already shown, and that the Fall of Genesis 3 corrupted, rather than instituted, masculine leadership (headship). Let us consider three issues from the Genesis 3 account.

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### **1. Eve’s deception.**

It was not by chance that Satan appealed first to the woman rather than to the man. Like all master deceivers, Satan looked for the best way to sell his lies. Knowing God’s creation design for the two sexes, he realized that the woman would be the more susceptible of the two to his subtle deceptions. He was right.

In verse 13, the woman herself frankly admits to God that Satan deceived her. So Satan struck at the woman first, attacking not only what God had said about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but also attacking God’s order for the couple’s relationship—she the helper, he the leader. German theologian Werner Neuer insightfully remarks, “The fall is therefore, not only the rebellion of mankind against God, but the setting aside of the divinely appointed order of male and female.”<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Eve's penalty.

As a result of her sin, Eve would be afflicted with pain in her chief roles as mother and wife (v. 16). The first part of Eve's penalty for her transgression relates to her role as mother: "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall bring forth children" (v. 16a).

The second part of Eve's penalty relates to her marital relationship: "Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you." In general terms, these two pronouncements ("desire...rule") initiate what we call the battle of the sexes. The precise meaning of the "desire...rule" pronouncement on Eve is very difficult to interpret with certainty, especially the meaning of the word "desire."<sup>31</sup> Whatever the exact meaning of the "desire...rule" phrase, the man-woman relationship is distorted, and the woman is especially frustrated by the relationship.

Although these judgments will not be completely removed from the earth until the end, Cottrell is right in saying, "This does not mean, however, that we must accept them passively, any more than we must accept death passively. The atonement of Christ gives us the warrant to fight against these penal effects of sin in whatever ways we can."<sup>32</sup>

## 3. Adam's penalty.

God curses the ground because of Adam's sin. Only by misery and hard work will it yield food for sustaining life. "The woman's punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother; the man's strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance."<sup>33</sup>

Finally, and decisively, Adam will die and return to the ground. Eve, too, shares in Adam's death penalty. The reason for her inclusion in his judgment is that Adam is the appointed, representative head of the first family. His headship is recognized by the way in which, after the Fall, God called to Adam, not the woman, to respond to His summons, although the woman fell first (v. 9). Furthermore, Adam's headship is demonstrated by the way in which the couple is referred to as "the man and his wife" (v.8). In biblical language and God's governmental structure for the human race, Adam, the first man, was the head of the first family and ultimately of the whole human race (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22,45).

In summary, Genesis 1 and 2 reveal that men and women are created equally in the image of God but are different in function and relationship roles. The rest of the Old Testament illustrates these gender-based differences in a fallen world:

- The prominent leaders of the Old Testament are men: Noah, Abraham, Job, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Saul, Samuel, David, Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah.
- Although priestesses were common in the religious practices of neighboring nations, Israel's priests were required to be male. It was not possible for a Hebrew woman to ever become a priestess. Israel had no female goddesses or priestesses and in this way was radically different from the surrounding nations.
- All of Israel's kings were male, except Athaliah, who violently usurped the throne.
- Almost all the leading national prophets were men, and we know of no women elders.

Women are not missing from the Old Testament history of God's covenant people, however. Women prayed directly to God with great effectiveness, offered sacrifices to Him through the priests, and walked in intimate relationship with Him. Throughout the Old Testament, we read of many godly, heroic, influential women—women of amazing strength, wisdom, and competence. Although God makes His covenant with Abraham, for example, Sarah is a leading player in the story. Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah stand as prominent women alongside their patriarchal husbands. Although real love and devotion are demonstrated between these couples, there is also cruelty and manipulation.

The primary role of the woman in the Old Testament was that of mother and wife. The high status of a wife and mother is praised in Proverbs 31:10: "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels." In some cases, women served in more public, national roles. For example, some women served at the "doorway of the tent of meeting" (Ex. 38:8), and some were prophetesses. Deborah was a prophetess and also a judge of Israel.<sup>34</sup> Among the women of Israel, Miriam was a leader and prophetess.

The Old Testament doesn't paint a romantic or idealistic picture of the treatment of women. It paints a realistic portrait. The Old Testament shows the cruelty of polygamy and the king's harem. We find examples of a double standard in sexual conduct (Gen. 38:11-26) under which men divorced their wives unjustly, but wives couldn't divorce their husbands. God hated their action and strongly condemned it through the prophet Malachi (Mal. 2:13-16). Summarizing the situation, Werner Neuer gives a balanced conclusion:

All these examples show that the undervaluation of women and discrimination against them in the Old Testament had not been fully overcome. Despite this, one must admit in the light of the mass of Old Testament evidence for the high valuation placed on women that (as Doller concludes) “Without doubt the woman in Israel had a status found among few other peoples.”<sup>35</sup>

With the foundation of Old Testament teaching securely under us, we are now ready to investigate the New Testament teaching on gender roles.



## Questions

1. List several reasons why our study begins in Genesis.
2. Do you believe that the Genesis account records accurate history and truth? Explain your answer.
3. What significant truths are taught in Genesis 1:26-28? Why are these truths vitally important to our study?
4. What do evangelical feminists believe Genesis 2 teaches concerning men and women?
5. How would you answer someone who says that Adam’s creation prior to Eve is irrelevant to the gender debate?
6. What does the statement, “Scripture interprets Scripture,” mean? Why is this principle of interpretation (“Scripture interprets Scripture”) especially important to our study?
7. Using Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:7-24, describe the activities God expected of the woman He created.
8. Using Genesis 2:7-24, describe the ways in which Adam and Eve were created equal.
9. What specific details in the Genesis 2 story demonstrate that Adam is to be the leader of the first couple?
10. What is meant by the term “the Fall”? Why is a belief in the Fall of the human race (Genesis 3) absolutely essential if we are to correctly understand gender problems and solutions?
11. In your own words, explain the meaning of the statement, “Adam, the first man, was the head of the first family and ultimately of the whole human race (see Romans 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22,45).
12. According to the Old Testament, what leadership positions were restricted to men only?
13. What impact does the cross of Jesus Christ have on God’s design for men and women? Explain your answer.
14. What did you learn from this chapter that will help shape your thinking and actions?