

Twisted Gender

Male and Female According to Scripture and Culture



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Jumping Right In

We live in an interesting time of twisted confusion regarding the nature of gender. Men and women wonder how to relate to one another in the home, the workplace, and in the churches of Jesus Christ. In many ways our world is more just, more equitable, and more open than any society in history. Great strides have been made to afford freedom in the workplace, political participation, and education for women in our culture. Yet our understanding of ourselves has also greatly eroded with many social struggles and aches. What began in Western culture to bring equality has led to a world that despises our differences, sees gender as a mere social construction, with both biblical masculinity and femininity cast aside. To be honest, it is simply an affront to the modern mind that God created us uniquely and distinctly as male and female, both biologically and psychologically. Though modern research is showing that down to our very brains, *we are different*, many persist in believing that men and women should occupy the same roles and spaces in the home and culture. We live in a time when men are thought to be capable of being as good of a mother as a woman and fatherhood is quickly becoming an endangered art. Take all this into the dating world and many just scratch their heads. In this paper my goals are not ambitious. I want to look briefly at our

struggles with *being* a man or a woman in our society. Second, I want to look at some of the confusion which is displayed both in pop culture and in academia regarding gender. In doing so I will look at the word *feminism* and strike fear into the hearts of the men—just kidding, but we will look at the strengths and weaknesses of feminism. Finally, I will close with a very brief treatment of gender according to the Bible with application to the family and the church. This will not be an in-depth research paper; just some analysis which I hope will assist us forward in our discussions of being men and women. So let us begin with our struggles...with ourselves.

Our Struggles with Ourselves

Our struggles with ourselves take unique forms in our day. Today many women have bought into models of success and life fulfillment which mirror the past excesses of men. Many are longing for deeper connections, motherhood and relationships where they are not objectified and gawked at like pieces of meat. Yes, even the old school institution of marriage is still quite popular today with women, though it is frustrating for many to try and find trustworthy and virtuous men. Complex questions abound for women. If you have the high-powered job, can you still have a family? Do I want someone who works a part-time job at day care being the primary

caregiver for my children? If you do choose to be a stay at home mom you will hear the voice of the radical feminist who maligns those who choose this path. How are you “successful” by changing diapers and talking baby talk all day? You are educated! You are wasting your life doing that! These issues are but a few struggles many modern women face.

Men, too, are polarizing into a unique struggle of their own. Some have grown so passive and effeminate that they fear asserting themselves in relationships with women. They have been momma’s boys for so long that they are frustrated at their own inability or unwillingness to lead. Fatherless men have a slow burning anger that explodes into violence against the women who have so populated their lives. Others have bought into the cultural narrative which tells men they are to be overassertive, heartless, sex-crazed idiots who perpetually live in a way which resembles a college freshman marching off to the fight club with Maxim magazine in tow.

Single men and women are also confused by the myriad of games played in the dating scene. Women have to show they are independent in today’s society, to get the job, provide the paycheck, pay the bills, and show they are strong. Yet in dating, how strong and independent should women present themselves? Too strong and men are intimidated. Too weak and they feel that they will get washed under in the world. Men too are perplexed as they want to be sensitive, compassionate, and

understanding to women. But not too much. Should we open doors or not? Should we look out for the ladies or is this offensive to them? It all gets very confusing with many of us weary of the games and just wanting to be vulnerable with others and find deep fulfilling friendships with the opposite sex. And yes, most want to find someone with whom to spend the rest of their lives.

Confusion in Today's Culture

We are a people today that could be categorized as gender-confused. If you ask someone today “what is a man” or “what is a woman” you might be greeted with vague stares. Many would say that you have asked a completely illegitimate question. They may say there simply is no reality to “man-ness or woman-ness” just sexless character traits which may be found in either. Others would want to answer, knowing there to be a difference, but we simply find no answer as to what we are as men and women.

I submit that we are currently in a crisis of both manhood and womanhood and the



culture reflects this. In this section, I want to briefly look at the state of manhood and womanhood with a specific focus on the effects of *radical* feminism on all of us. First, let's look at what has happened in the past several decades as our desire to escape a male dominated world has taken some interesting turns.

Waves of Feminism and Attendant Effects

Words like *feminism* need to be defined in order to talk about them. It simply means too many things to too many people to just kick it around without saying what we mean by the term. Let me begin by saying how I am not using it. If by feminism we mean equal rights for all people, equality of persons in value, equal participation in society, opportunity for education, leadership etc. for women, I am not in any way opposed. As a husband and father of two daughters I am thankful for the great strides of seeing male and female as equal in value in our culture. Our past is indeed littered, both church and broader society, with the abuse, oppression, and disenfranchisement of women. The feminist movement did us all a favor in raising many of the right questions about the relationships of men and women. However I firmly believe that the feminist movement has led us to many disastrous recommendations and solutions to some of the problems we have seen. Some of these recommendations have actually urged women to adapt some of the excesses and wrongheaded ideas of certain men.

Fredrica Mathewes-Green insightfully comments on some of this unfortunate mimicking of male madness in her award-winning essay, *Three Bad Ideas for Women*.

So feminism concluded that men, despite being idiots, were on-target about how we should live our lives. If men thought that housewives were dumb, that staying home and raising kids was mindless drudgery, it was so. It didn't matter that our foremothers for generations had found homemaking noble and fulfilling. What did they know—they were stupid housewives! We were embarrassed by our female ancestors and envied the males. They had power, and we wanted power. We couldn't imagine any success except success in men's terms. Thus, feminism unconsciously adopted the very values of the people they claimed to be opposing, because it's so easy to get confused about what you really want. We ignored the evidence of our own eyes. We saw men losing their identities in their careers, exhausted in the "rat race," nourishing ulcers at three-martini lunches, and dying early of heart attacks. Yet we clawed to gain the same privilege. Even the painful absence of our own daddies from our childhoods didn't cause us to question this goal. It was the sour grapes principle in reverse: the grapes may look sour, but as long as men wanted them we'd choke them down.¹

Additionally, she follows the same thinking regarding views of sex taken by women in the last several decades.

This is another way that women adopted unhealthy male values: they began thinking of sex as a contest or power-play rather than an act of vulnerability and intimacy. Young women were encouraged to be sexual aggressors, and to think of themselves as free agents who could take up and discard men at will. They quickly noticed that men were amusingly helpless when lust was provoked, much more than women are, and their ability to elicit this helplessness made them feel powerful. An extreme example of this is the topless dancer, who commands the attention of a roomful of

men, all of who seem to be at her mercy. But as an ex-dancer once told me, "I had to ask myself, if I have all the power, how come I'm the only one in the room who's naked?" ²



There is something else that has been pushed in the last few decades that is much more than mere equality. What we see now is an all-out crusade in Western societies to create gender-neutral or genderless societies. This is unprecedented in all of history. Today we are living in a culture which the academic and cultural elites are seeking to make genderless. Harvard professor, Harvey Mansfield in his book *Manliness* describes the current reality as follows:

To overcome prejudice against women, they must be said and shown to be equal to men. It is not enough to merely set aside differences. That is the principle. But since the new principle, like everything else new in morals and manners, will meet resistance, it is necessary in practice to abolish or lessen sexual differences, at least the important ones. The meaning of gender neutrality, therefore, is transformed to some degree by the effort required to attain it. From a formal, negative, principle abstracting from sexual differences it becomes an actual, positive reformation as so to do away with them. Because there are no gender neutral human beings, the gender neutral society cannot simply let nature take its course; take off the pressure to be your sex, one might think, and both sexes will relax, everyone will become gender-neutral. This will not work; pressure in favor of gender neutrality needs to be applied.

For some feminists, we shall see, the refashioning goes very far; they believe that gender neutrality can only be achieved only if women are as sexually free as the most adventurous men.³

Mary Kassian sees the effects of radical feminism on church and culture in three historical stages:

Feminism began with a deconstruction of a Judeo-Christian view of womanhood (the right to name self); progressed to the deconstruction of manhood, gender-relationships, family/societal structures, and a Judeo-Christian worldview (the right to name the world); and concluded with the concept of metaphysical pluralism, self-deification, and the rejection of the Judeo-Christian deity (the right to name God).⁴

In the first phase the genders “MALE” and “FEMALE” are declared to be anything we want them to be. There is no definition from God that has any reality to it for being a woman or a man for that matter. All is constructed by the self. We define who and what we are. In the second phase marriage is attacked as subjugating women, children are at worst unwanted or at best an accessory to self-fulfillment. The family is seen as an antiquated artifact of the past which autonomous, independent, individuals pursue self-fulfillment rather than self-giving love in the home. One radical feminist recently weighed in on the large amount of young professional, educated women choosing to

leave the workforce to raise their own children. Her comments are very revealing:

I stumbled across the information that educated women who are in a position to have a whole range of choices about their lives were choosing to marry and stay home with their children instead of remaining in the world of work. What they actually had done was recreate the 1950s life. Then I asked the question, "Is this good?" according to the standards of secular Western goodness. I applied those standards to the decision to stay home and tend children and the household, and I found that they were, in fact, lacking. These women are not using their full human capacity. They are not independent, and they are not doing more social good than harm.

I'm not sure what is going on. If they, in fact, believe the things that they tell me, then they are incredibly stupid and foolish. I'm hoping that they're reciting it like a mantra: "choice, choice, choice, choice," or "I never met a man who wished on his deathbed he spent more time at work." These are mantras that these women recite; they send them to me in e-mails. And so, when the whole society is telling you a set of things, it becomes very easy to just recite it. The interesting question is why they are unwilling to think through what they're doing. And I think it's because what they're doing is destructive and dangerous and they're afraid to face it.⁵

If women who desire to be moms to their children are considered destructive and dangerous we truly live in an age of madness. Finally, God himself/herself/itself is said to be whoever we want god to be. Pagan milk and honey ceremonies have replaced Holy Communion at some mainline protestant conferences and God the Father replaced by the female goddess, *Sophia*.⁶ Bibles, hymns, liturgies, and the Lord's Prayer are being re-written to eliminate references to God the Father and Jesus the Son for these are oppressive modes of patriarchy. Gender neutral language is demanded of the Scriptures and its words actually changed in order to mute its "patriarchal overtones." In just a few decades we have torn down the wisdom of the past in order to "set women free and make us all independent of one another." There have been some great things which have come from equality movements, but the results on all of life by the radical fringe have been disorienting and destructive. We will look at some of the results in society in a moment, but before heading there, I want us to turn for a moment and look at the state of manhood and ask ourselves if we are now producing better men.

Where Have All Gentlemen Gone?

There was once something known as a gentleman in our culture. He was a man of virtue who was a guardian of a woman's honor. He opened doors, put the needs of others above his own, and served his family in all of his flawed humanity. He was

not a superman, yet he respected women and looked responsibility in the eyes. However, his chivalrous ways were an offense to many in the enlightened crowd and was kindly asked to leave the party. Now we miss him, many women want him back, for the manhood which has emerged in the vacuum is angry and violent or quite simply a passive, irresponsible joke.

There are only a few prototypes found in pop culture when it comes to men. Most are given to us for our entertainment, to either make us laugh or give us a rush of adventure. In flipping the dial or watching the big screens we will find something peculiar in looking at the presentation of men. You find bumbling incompetent idiots, violent action heroes, or bed-hopping guys and not much in between. We like men as idiots. They make us laugh. Idiot men are funny so we fill our sitcoms with them. Homer Simpson, *The Family Guy*, the troubling boys of South Park, and the various characters played by David Spade help us to laugh at the male idiot. Men as dominating, violent conquerors are also entertaining, so we create action heroes. Jack Bauer of *24*, Jason Bourne, and the myriad of Tom Cruise characters attract us to the risk and adventure which our everyday lives crave. Finding a man to jump in bed with the ladies is also easy to find—most of them play doctors on TV. Yet something is absent. Very seldom do we find men of virtue, of love, service, strong for their families, and who are responsible. This is

neither good comedy nor good action; some would say it is boring. Additionally, women are increasingly objectified as the objects of sexual appetites of men. From the proliferation of pornography, strip clubs, soft porn men's magazines, to the idiocy of *Girls Gone Wild*, men in pop culture are increasingly exposed to the idea that the sex-crazed male is a sign of manhood. So manhood remains a shallow and grotesque pursuit in popular images.

In the real day-to-day world many boys are struggling immensely and are falling behind in educational aptitude. The US Department of Education recently reported that for every 135 women receiving college degrees; only 100 men do the same.⁷ In 1996 there were 8.4 million women but only 6.7 million men enrolled in college. The department predicts that women will increase this differential and that by 2007 the numbers will grow to be 9.2 million women and 6.9 million men.⁸ Social data on boys appears troubling indeed. Christiana Hoff Sommers, W. H. Brady Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, records the following:

More boys than girls are suspended from school. More are held back and more drop out...More boys than girls are involved in crime, alcohol, and drugs. Girls attempt suicide more often than boys, but it is boys who more often succeed. In 1997, a typical year, 4,483 young people aged five to 24 committed suicide: 701 females and 3,782 males.⁹

The unemployment rate for young men ages 20-24 is 10.1%, which is over two times the national average and upwards of five million men are either in prisons today or on probation.¹⁰ Many have questioned the high degree of diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder where 90% of those with this condition are boys.¹¹ Some no doubt have a medical problem and treatment is necessary, but in many cases could it be that boys are just being boys and being medicated because they simply cannot sit still. The signs point to the fact that many troubled boys are missing a crucial ingredient in becoming responsible young men—Dad. Sommers records the conclusions of sociologist David Blankenhorn in relating the absence of Dad and troubled men, “Despite the difficulty of proving causation in the social sciences, the weight of evidence increasingly supports the conclusion that fatherlessness is a primary generator of violence among young men.”¹²

Terrence O. Moore describes poignantly that many of today’s young men tend to oscillate between barbarians and wimps. In speaking of his interactions with young women as a college professor and the principle of a K-12 classical school Dr. Moore shares the following:

They say matter-of-factly that the males around them do not know how to act like either men or gentlemen. It appears to them that, except for a few lucky members of their sex, most women today must choose between males who are

*whiny, incapable of making decisions and in general of “acting like men,” or those who treat women roughly and are unreliable, unmannerly, and usually stupid. The young men, for their part, are not a little embarrassed when they hear these charges but can’t wholly deny them. Indeed, when asked the simple question, “When have you ever been taught what it means to be a man?” they are typically speechless and somewhat ashamed.*¹³

I am not trying to present a gloom and doom picture of the state of manhood in our society, I am only trying to show that the confusion in culture is real and it affects all of us. Where have all the gentlemen gone? Many are reading this and faithfully walking with character in this culture. Many men are yet being shaped today; others are set adrift in a state of confusion which has them either angry or pacified. Neither is a good option, for we all need real men, not wimps who leave when the battles of life rage, nor barbarians who turn and eat (or abandon) their own.

The effects of a radical feminist agenda are not universal in reach and most women and men dissent from its more drastic forms. Yet this view of gender is pushed in the universities, by the media, and by some historically Christian denominations and institutions. There is indeed a pressed agenda to create a public life not of equality but gender neutrality. In such a society where men and women are trying

to be conceived as having no essential differences apart from biology, we are all like ships coming home without a lighthouse. Perhaps we will make the safe harbors, yet many may be dashed upon the rocks. The results in our society have been profound on the relationships between men and women. The following statistics are merely indicative of the crisis we are seeing today that has arrived along with the confusion of gender.

- **Marriage** – From 1960 to 2000 the divorce rate has increased more than 100%. The number of marriages has dropped by 41% while cohabitation has increased 1,000% among 15-44 year olds.¹⁴
- **Children** – From 1960 to 2000 the percentage of out-of-wedlock births increased from 5.3 to 33 percent – a 523% increase. Only 45% of teenage kids live with their married biological father and mother.¹⁵
- **Sexual Assault** – Every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted. One in six American women are victims of sexual assault, and one



in 33 men. In 2004-2005, there was an average annual 200,780 victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault. About 44% of rape victims are under age 18, and 80% are under age 30. **Good news:** Since 1993, rape/sexual assault has fallen by over 69%.¹⁶ Still, some statistics show that as many as four out of 10 women have been sexually abused in some way. Though violent crime and sexual assault is decreasing, we still see an incredible risk, primarily to women, at the hands of men.

The Teaching of Scripture

We have looked at the state of gender in contemporary culture. Now I want us to turn our eyes to the ancient wisdom of the Scriptures. Many times if the goals of radical feminism are challenged, people are accused of wanting to turn the clock back to the 1950s. I have no such desire or goal. Rather, I would like us to look at a timeless vision of manhood and womanhood according to the Bible. History is replete with examples of progress and regress in all manner of cultures and societies. What I am interested in is guidance given to us by the very Creator of our lives. The biblical view of the sexes is somewhat different than the modern view which establishes the free independence of individuals as its highest ethic. No, male and female are not in any way defined as separated and independent from one another in Scripture. The vision we find there is one of complementary interdependence,

where our lives are always lived, defined, and connected by God in families and community. God's people never are to be seen as not needing one another. Rather we are to see in our togetherness a more complete vision of the God who created us. In our relationships with one another we have the privilege of reflecting Him, honoring Him and glorifying Him as male and female together.

Created and Redeemed as Male and Female

In contrast with the modern view that gender is created and constructed by individuals or cultures, the Bible is clear that God is the author and creator of our lives as male and female. The Scriptures begin with the account of God the creator's activity in making the universe, our planet, its creatures, and human beings. These creatures are said to be uniquely created in the *imago dei*, the image of God and thereby are the glorious crown of His work. After God creates the man (*Adam* is Hebrew for man) He declares that it is not good that he be alone. All the women said Amen! They know why this is the case; it is just *not good* for the men to be left alone. So God in His wisdom fashions a complement for Adam who is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. From this point onward all human beings are born from this women, Eve—literally the mother of the living. It is very clear that both male and female are created in the image of God. Human beings are created and then given the great responsibility to steward creation as God's vice-regents on the earth.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them. ²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:26-28



The first premise of God's creation is that men and women are created as distinct, yet complementary, reflections of the person of God. We are made equal before God, each indispensable in His plans to reflect His glory on the earth. We will hit more on this when we discuss the union of men and women in marriage, but for now the radical equality of the Bible is in full view.

In addition to our creation as male and female, God also makes it clear in Scripture that both men and women have equal access to Him through the work

of Jesus on the cross. The equality of women in the worship of God was something very unique in the life and teaching of Jesus. Women in the days of Jesus were very much second class citizens who occupied a second seat in the matters of Judaism. Additionally, Greco-Roman philosophy saw the male as the completed sex, closer to the gods, and the woman as less perfect in her being. Early heretical visions of Christianity represented in the Gnostic gospels also had strange views which mirrored this philosophy. An interesting saying is found in the Gospel of Thomas regarding Mary of Magdala (Mary Magdelene).

¹¹⁴ Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven." ¹⁷

This passage is so shocking that many want to remove it from this false gospel. Yet we have no textual evidence that it is not part of the work and so it remains. In contrast to the ancient views of women, Jesus and the early church actually broke with both religious and social conventions in a shocking number of ways. The following list is illustrative, though not exhaustive.

- Jesus taught women and included them as His disciples (which means followers-learners). (Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:26-56)
- Jesus shared good news with women in public and crossed social and racial boundaries to do so. (See John 4)
- The first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb were a group of His women followers. This is a great reassurance of the truth of the resurrection narratives. If someone was making up the story they certainly would not have had women giving the first testimony of the resurrection as the woman's voice was not counted as reliable testimony in that day.
- The very first evangelist, sharing the good news of the resurrection, was Mary Magdelene.
- The apostle Paul lists many women among his associates in ministry. (Acts 16; Rom. 16; Philippians 4)
- Influential women helped to provide for both the ministry of Jesus and the apostle Paul. (See Lydia's hospitality in Acts 16; Mark 15:41.)

Perhaps the clearest passage in the New Testament of the equality of men and women in the work of redemption is found in the epistle to the Galatians. In this great book, the apostle Paul describes the work of salvation by grace through faith, not by works of the law. In the third chapter we find the following statement.

²³Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:23-28

In the ancient world there were certain distinctions made by people in their culture. There were slaves and there were free people. There were Jews and Greeks. There were males and females. The point Paul is making is not that Jews/Greeks become the same, or all slaves instantly go free by believing in Jesus, or that male and female are no longer distinctions in reality. What he is saying is much more wonderful than this. All are accepted in Christ equally; no one is considered left out by the work of the cross due to ethnicity, economic position, or gender. Through the cross of Jesus, by faith in Him, all have equal access to God together. This was revolutionary for the religious and social world of the 1st century. This is the context and the clear meaning of Galatians 3:28. This

is important as this verse is made by some to say that “there is no longer any distinction in roles/responsibilities” between men and women in Christ. This is simply not the context of the passage, nor can this be used to mute the other clear passages of Scripture that call men and women to different roles/responsibilities in the mission of God in the home and the church. To the topic of the mutuality of the mission of God we now turn.

The Mutuality of the Mission of God

God has created and redeemed both men and women. All who come by faith in the completed work of Jesus on the cross have full access to the Father by His grace. He places His redeemed children in covenant relationships with Himself and one another for the express purpose of displaying and manifesting something about God to the world in which we live. In the mutual, interdependent relationships between men and women, God is seen in a full and beautiful fashion and the Word of God is honored. Paul’s words to his disciple Titus make this clear:

¹But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. ²Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴and so train

the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. ⁶Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Titus 2:1-8

The church is made up of old and young, each connected to the other, teaching and training the next generation in the home and in the community of the church. It is these two realms of relationships that we will observe God's design for men and women.

Design in Our Homes

Marriage is a uniquely ordained and designed covenant relationship whereby a man and woman pledge faithful love to one another for as long as they are alive. Marriage has been given a specific design by God in order to fulfill a specific purpose. When we look at the purpose of God in marriage we look at His desire to give good gifts to His children and to bring glory to Himself. Marriage is a distinct relationship that is designed to create and rear children, unify man and woman, give them pleasure of marital love, and to display the fashion in which Jesus Himself relates to the church.

Ephesians 5 teaches this beautiful reality with clarity:

¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the

church. ³³*However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* Ephesians 5:17-33

Several things need to be mentioned here. The designed order in marriage is not arbitrary, but it analogous to Jesus’ relationship to the church. For the analogy to hold, both the role of husband and wife have a design to them which reflects Jesus’ relationship to the church. The following table is helpful to see this fully.

Christ	His Church	The Husband	The Wife
Loves the Church	Is the Bride of Christ	Loves his wife	Is the Bride of Her Husband
Serves and adorns the Church	Submits to Christ	Serves and adorns his wife	Submits to Him / On His Team
Dies for the Church	Respects Christ	Dies for his wife	Respects Her Husband

If we do not see that our marriages are designed to reflect Jesus and His church we will not embrace God’s design for us in marriage. This is the ideal for marriage—men should love, adorn, and take care of their wives. In short, he is responsible before God for his family. He should lead as a servant, be there for his family, esteem his wife, and accept responsibility and teach his family the gospel

of Jesus Christ. Wives should respect, honor, support and give herself to her husband and connect her family to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, if it were only this easy to live. Our sin has introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7,12,16) which manifest in our relationships with one another. Husbands can become tyrannical and domineering or they can abdicate responsibility being passive moshes frustrating their wives. Wives can desire to fight their husbands and remove his responsibility or they can become servile not seeing the active nature of her role as unique helper to her husband. There is much more which could be said about our roles and responses to one another in marriage, but I will refer the reader to other sources for this purpose.¹⁸

Reflecting the Trinity in the Church Family

It should be restated at this point that the point of our relationships as men and women is interdependence and reflecting fully the glory of the triune God. It is not pursuit and glorification of self-independence and autonomy. This is true for single men or single women as well. All of us are part of the broader family of God, known as the church and we live our lives together as men and women in this family. Our creation as male and female go beyond being married, for marriage is not ordained for all of the people of God (1 Cor. 7 does indicate that many will marry but all will not). Male and

female reflect God uniquely whether single or married in the way we relate to one another. Writing to the Corinthians the apostle Paul says the following.¹⁹

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God...⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.¹¹In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.¹²For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 1 Corinthians 11:3,8,11-12 (NIV)

The design of men and women is a reflection of the triune God. This is very important to see. Jesus the Son of God fully submits to the Father, this is no insult to Him, but honors His Father. The Father has a certain authority, but only to love His Son fully. Single men and women along with those who are married should see their lives together as a unique expression of the triune God. We should seek unique ways to serve the mission of the gospel together as a community under the shepherding, teaching, and authority of godly elders and the care and ministry of men and women serving as deacons. We look at these roles and the issue of ministry in the church to close our look at the Scriptures.

Design in the church

One of the great blessings of the church of Jesus Christ is being on mission together. Jesus has sent us into the world to be His ambassadors of this Kingdom (John 20:21; 2 Cor. 5:17-20), to share the gospel with those in darkness, and to serve the poor and the oppressed. One of the great joys of this mission is that men and women do the work of the ministry together. Married, single, men and women, adults and children serve under the authority of the Lord Jesus to move forward His Kingdom business in the earth. In this mission His people are given gifts to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12) and accomplish every work set before us. This work is done under the authority of the chief shepherd of the church, Jesus Christ, as He vests His authority to elders who shepherd or pastor the people of God (1 Peter 5:1-4). These elders are to be qualified men who oversee the doctrine and health of the church to the glory of God. The elders also guide the ministry of the church and call upon gifted women and men to serve as deacons/servants/ministers for the building up of the body of Christ. Though a full treatment of elders and deacons is beyond the scope of this paper, I do want to briefly touch upon them as it is important for full affirmation of women in ministry. It is our position that church ministries are open to qualified men and women with the singular exception of elder/teaching pastor, which is only for qualified men.

Women can be deacons, teach, lead worship, serve communion, and be in full-time ministry under the authority of God vested in a plurality of male elders serving under the Lordship of Jesus and His Word. Let us now look briefly at each of these roles in turn.

Elders/Overseers

The term we are most familiar with in our current culture is “pastor.” This can be misleading because “pastor” is not a common New Testament title for church leaders. Pastoring/shepherding (the word *poimnen*) is used mostly as a verb, the action of shepherding. This calling is usually given to men who are called “elders/overseers.” In fact, we know that the same people are called elders and overseers in the same context in both Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5. The New Bible Commentary on Philippians has an insightful summary of who elders/overseers were and their function: *Eldership was their place in the community, oversight their responsibility.*²⁰ There are two main passages which directly address what type of person an elder ought to be: Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. We hold that men should be elders precisely because of these passages of Scripture. There is simply no way to apply these texts to women. As mentioned above, some attempt to use Galatians 3:28 to teach all roles in the church are open to everyone regardless of gender. However,

this passage says nothing of the calling of an elder in the church. Since one of the key roles of an elder is to teach sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it, our elders do most of the teaching from our pulpit. It has nothing to do with how gifted someone is, how well they speak, but rather the ordering of the church according to the Word of God. Men are called in Scripture to serve the church in this fashion. The Old Testament, the person of Jesus in choosing His apostles, the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestant Churches (until very recently) have all been univocal about this issue. God calls men to these roles in the church. But some men go too far in limiting the role of women in ministry, and this impoverishes the mission of God in our midst. For clearly in the Bible women are active in serving the mission in a myriad of ways (See above bullets under equality in redemption.) The role and calling of the deacon should be populated by gifted women and men who honor the gospel and the Word of God.

Deacons

Many are confused today as to what “deacons” are and what they are to do in the church. To put it very simply, deacons are those who have been called upon by the pastor/elders to serve all sorts of needs which arise in the church. The word diakonos/deacon simply means “servant” or “minister.” Both men and women are called

deacons in the New Testament (Romans 16:1-16; 1 Timothy 3:8-11). A church can call out deacons to serve in many areas of need. There can be deacons of administration, serving needs within the congregation, or serving the poor. There can be deacons who assist in worship, deacons of technology, communication, graphic design and just about anything that serves a need for the people of God. Deacons are set aside for gospel ministry and function at the discretion of the elders of the church. In our church many team leaders and community group leaders effectively function as deacons. Specifically at Jacob's Well we have women and men serving in this way at every level of our church which are overseen by pastors who try to hear from Jesus and not mess everything up.

Our community values both men and women equally. Our community has women and men leading in all capacities. Our community also will not bend to the cultural practices which do not see God's design and order in our gender. Here we stand...amidst the chaos.

Concluding Thoughts

As we bring this rather lengthy journey to a close I wanted to offer a bit of a charge to both the gentlemen and ladies. I know these titles are a bit Old School, but we just roll that way. I offer these thoughts to you as both a father of daughters and a son, as a pastor and a fellow pilgrim in the way of Jesus. I have gone to lengths to wrestle with these issues because I passionately love the glory of our God and I passionately love you, His people.

May God encourage you as you walk with Him, growing, learning, failing, hurting, achieving, and striving to be more like Jesus our great covenant King. And yes, do read the exhortations to the opposite sex. Yeah, I knew you would anyway.

For the Gentlemen

I stand with you guys in longing for God to do more in me than I see in myself today. Our progress is slow; we are at times selfish and lazy and there are so many responsibilities before us. I want to encourage you to turn your hearts to Jesus as your model and means to godly manhood. See His cross when you think of what you are called to do for others. I want you to reject fear and stand for honor and virtue in the world. I want you to look out for your sisters in a world populated by wimps and barbarians. I want you to be men that people feel secure with, feel honored by, and

feel respected and cared for in your presence. I want you to reject male superiority and take the form of a servant like Jesus. I want you to call each other forward towards holiness, learning, and the many Kingdom battlefronts in this world. I want you to be gentlemen, but not in a nostalgic sense, but a Christ-centered one. One that sees needs and meets them, one that sees the hurting and comforts them, one that has broad shoulders because there are burdens to bear for the sake of the gospel. I want you to quit being AWOL from the church and give of your time and leisure to serve in Kingdom purposes. I want you to thank God for the faithful service of your sisters in Christ, but they should not be bearing the load disproportionately without you. If someday God grants you to marry, I want you to take to your knees in dependence. I want you to love your wives deeply, wildly, and gently. I want you to handle her with care and compassion, but I want you to lead. Anticipate her spiritual needs, guide your family through the troubled waters outside of Eden, and do not passively sit by while she wrestles alone with life's major decisions. And if children should come, oh man, embrace your role as Father. Your little men will need you to show them how to love and respect a woman. They will need you to focus their restlessness, passion, and strength. They will need a leader, a warrior, a mentor and a friend. And if the crowning grace of little girls comes to your home, breathe deeply your sense of dignity and wildly love your princesses. Protect their hearts, teach

them about God, and honor their mother in full-view all the days of their lives. I will close with an exhortation from Dr. Meg Meeker, a girl who had a strong man in her life that she called Dad:

Most of you out there are good men as well, but you are good men who have been derided by a culture that does not care for you, that, in terms of the family, has ridiculed your authority, denied your importance, and tried to fill you with confusion about your role. But I can tell you that fathers change lives, as my father changed mine. You are natural leaders, and your family looks to you for qualities that only fathers have. You were made a man for a reason, and your daughter is looking to you for guidance that she cannot get from her mother.²¹

For the Ladies

I have two young daughters so I have many, many dreams for young women today. If I could give a tiny bit of counsel to them and to you it would be this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength. Put His honor above all things and do not be ashamed of the Word of God. Take every advantage of your educational and career opportunities. Serve the community with skill,

leadership, and the grace that God places in your soul. Do your best, but don't sell out to the myths of careerism and don't give yourself or your bodies to men who do not honor you, make you better, or love you in the way of Jesus. Continue to show patience in God's plan for your life, be it in singleness or marriage. While you are single serve, connect, and do not be so busy you cannot spend time with families. If you do marry, love and respect your husband. Believe in him, he will be so much a better man because of your standing with him. Submit to his leadership because of what can be seen in your marriage to glorify the Lord Jesus. And if by God's grace you are given children, pray long and hard about the person(s) you most want loving and shaping their tiny souls. No man or worker can ever be a mother, God has granted this gift only to you. Do not be embarrassed by your unique feminine urges to love, connect, nurture and bond deeply. Do not fear being strong for those around you—it is part of your calling. Do not trivialize or treat Proverbs 31 as a cliché, it is a beautiful picture of holistic femininity given to you by your God. Remember, you always have and will continue to shape the men of this world. Your belief in, encouragement, and esteem of the guys will go a long way making them all God wants them to be. Any belittling of them wounds deeper than you could know. You are unique, you are a woman, and you are a wonderful cameo of the image of God. In the Lord, woman is not independent of man or man of woman;

for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Yes, all things were created by Him and for Him. Including you—you are one of the most striking, beautiful, creations of the Almighty God. Reject this image-based, sex-crazed culture and see yourselves as daughters of the Most High, prized possessions of Jesus, your great refuge and King. Let your adornment be the person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Soli Deo Gloria,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reid S. Monaghan', written in a cursive style.

Reid S. Monaghan

Endnotes

- ¹ Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Three Bad Ideas for Women* (Touchstone Magazine, 2001, accessed February 28 2007); available from <http://www.frederica.com/writings/three-bad-ideas-for-women.html>.
- ² Ibid. (accessed).
- ³ Harvey Claflin Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2.
- ⁴ Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Mistake - the Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), 9.
- ⁵ Alice Chasan, *On the Frontline of the Mommy Wars - An Interview with Linda Hirshman* (Beliefnet, accessed February 28 2007); available from http://www.beliefnet.com/story/202/story_20237_1.html.
- ⁶ See Craig Branch, "Sophia Worship" *The Watchman Expositor* 11, no. 5 (1994). One of the more shocking developments at the 1993 Re-imagining conference was the prayer and supplication to "Our Maker Sophia." Participants from Presbyterian (PCUSA), United Methodist, Lutheran (ELCA) and other mainline denominations participated in a ritual called "Milk and Honey" calling for Sophia's aid in replacing the traditional Christianity (Presbyterian Layman, January-February 1994).
- ⁷ Department of Education study cited in "Big (Lack of) Men on Campus," *USA Today*, 9/22/2005 2005.
- ⁸ Christina Hoff Sommers, "The War Against Boys," *The Atlantic Monthly* Volume 285, no. 5 (2000).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Big (Lack of) Men on Campus.”

¹¹ Anne Brown, “The Difficulty of Diagnosing Adhd and Bipolar Disorder in Children,” *The NARSAD Research Newsletter*.

¹² Sommers.

¹³ Terrance Moore, “Barbarians and Wimps - The Sons of Murphy Brown Come Home,” *Claremont Review of Books* IV, no. 1 (2003).

¹⁴ Kassian, 8-9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ US Department of Justice, 2005 *National Crime Victimization Survey* (2006, accessed March 1 2007); available from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv05.pdf>.

¹⁷ *The Gospel of Thomas*, (accessed March 1 2007); available from <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gthlamb.html>.

¹⁸ See Ken Sande, *Love and Respect in Marriage* (Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, accessed March 1 2007); available from <http://www.cbmw.org/article.php?id=83>.

¹⁹I have intentionally trimmed down the passage here as to not comment on the “head coverings” and authority issues. I want to say that IS THE CONTEXT for these verses and the issues it raises are very important. However, to cover what is meant by a “covering” for women in the church, and how that manifests in ancient and contemporary cultures is a longer discussion. For those who are interested, please see <http://www.cbmw.org/questions/32.php> for a brief treatment of head coverings or for a fuller treatment see - Thomas R. Schreiner, “*Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity - 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,*” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991, 2006).

²⁰D. A. Carson, ed., *New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century Edition, Rev. Ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd Ed. / Edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970., 4th ed. ed. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

²¹Meg Meeker, *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2006), 4.

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Note

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Notes



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