

God's Good Gift of Sex and Gender

Lesson 2: Gender Roles in Family and Church

What does it look like for someone to exercise biblical authority in the church? What does it look like for someone to exercise biblical authority in the home?

Review from Lesson 1

- Overview of modern sexual morality and historical review of Christian sexual revolution
- Male/Female together are image bearers of God
- Marriage is two becoming one (uniting different individuals, families, and genders)
- Sex is powerful: Power to unite or to destroy

Gender Roles in the Family

Does gender matter in the family?

Ephesians 5:21–25 *[21] submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. [22] Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. [25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*

1 Corinthians 11:3, 11 *[3] But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. [11] Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;*

1 Peter 3:1, 7 *[1] Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives...[7] Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

Key Observations

1. Equal Dignity and Status of men and women

- Eph. 5:21 “Submitting to one another”
- 1 Cor. 11:11 “woman is not independent of man nor man of woman”
- 1 Pet. 3:7 “heirs with you” (co-heirs)
- This accords with Gen. 1:27 (both are image of God); Gal. 3:28 “in Christ...there is neither male nor female;” Acts 2:17f “Spirit poured out on men and women.”

2. Different complementary roles of authority in the relationship based on gender.

- Wives submit to husbands; husbands love wives.
- “Weaker/lesser vessel” in 1 Pet. 3:7 is most likely referring to the role in the marriage that carries less authority. A person may be physically stronger,

intellectually smarter and more spiritually mature in comparison to another who has a “higher rank” in the organization.

- The context is always spiritual authority.
- The context is within marriage: Can a wife hold a higher position of authority at work or in government than her husband? You may ask the same question about a son holding an office above his father.

3. No indication in the Bible that these different roles are based on skill, intellect, or natural abilities inherent in each gender.

- Should a wiser or more skilled wife complain that this is unfair?
- It is not a meritocracy. In Godly institutions like family and church, spiritual authority is not earned; it’s derived. It is Christ’s authority. Neither partner is worthy of the authority. The charge, however, is given to the husband to exercise that authority.
- Functional subordination need not entail inferiority of any kind.

4. The Bible doesn’t specify particular jobs that are associated with each role in the family.

- Paul doesn’t specify who should do the dishes or take out the trash. Scripture doesn’t specify who should stay home to care for the children and who should work.

What does Spiritual Authority mean in the context of marriage?

- Spiritually shepherding the family in the gospel, in Christ-centered sacrificial love
- Leading the family to Christ
- Discerning God’s callings for the family (you wouldn’t expect godly discernment to ignore or neglect the wife’s input)

What would abuse of this authority look like?

What can a husband do to lead his family spiritually? What are examples of family worship, catechizing, or encouragement that husbands are called to lead?

Gender Roles in the Church

What is the relationship between the institutions of church and family?

God has chosen the metaphor of marriage to define and describe the relationship between God and his people. Eph. 2:19 and 1 Tim. 3:24 speak of the church as the “household of God.”

The same sacred “role-play” that is found in marriage also appears in the church.

1 Timothy 2:12 *I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*

1 Corinthians 14:34 *the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.*

1 Timothy 3:2 *Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,*
Titus 1:6 *if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*

The context of these passages is church authority. Headship roles of men in relation to women are not to be applied generally. All men do not have spiritual authority over all women in the church.

Rather, the “authority” of men in relation to women is directed to men and women in so far as they are “husband and wife” or “church member and officer” respectively.

We affirm that the Bible teaches church office is open only to chosen men.

The issue has less to do with men vs. women, and more to do with “ordained” vs. “non-ordained.” Ordained office has been widely denigrated in the modern church.

Which issue has the culture influenced the church more: women’s roles in the church or the rejection of church authority?

Scripture gives ordained officers (elders and deacons) a spiritual authority based on office.

Acts 20:28 *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

The authority wielded by an officer is not independent of Christ and can only be exercised from what is stated in scripture (or by good and necessary inference derived from scripture).

- Phil. 1:1 acknowledges two offices “elder/overseer” and “deacon.” 1 Timothy and Titus describe qualifications for these two offices.
- The New Testament describes the appointment of officers by “laying on of hands” (Acts 13:1-3, 1 Timothy 5:22)
- Acts 6:6 the first deacons are appointed “by laying on of hands.” The symbolism of “laying hands” is to convey authority in office.

It is a fallible authority pertaining to the visible church representing Christ’s infallible authority over the true and heavenly church of God. (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

God has designed for gender to play a role in those who serve in spiritual office in the church like the roles in the family. Like with the family, the office is not earned. That doesn't mean there aren't qualifications, but the authority rests in the office more than in the abilities of the man serving in office.

Women's voices are not marginalized by male-only ordained officers. The office must be bigger than the person. Officers must put their personal preferences aside to serve the interests of Christ in ministry. Men must not serve out of their own voice. Seeking ordination is a misguided strategy to expand female influence in church.

Women in Church Ministry

There is a difference between being a "leader" in all sorts of ways, and representing Christ in office.

Scripture includes examples of women teaching and leading: Abigail, who rebuked David in 1 Samuel 25, or Priscilla who, with her husband Aquila, corrected the defective theology of Apollos in Acts 18:26. Gifted women prophesied (1 Cor. 11:5)

Paul exhorts all Christians, male and female, to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs..." (Col. 3:16). Nothing in the context suggests Paul meant only men. Women were the first evangelists of the resurrection of the Lord, even when some found it difficult to believe (Luke 24:10).

Romans 16 alone recognizes many women in ministry leadership.

- The Apostle Paul calls Priscilla a "fellow worker" (Rom.16:3),
- acknowledges Mary "who labored much" (Rom.16:6),
- Junia who because of her labors in the Lord was a "fellow prisoner" with Paul (Rom.16:7)
- Tryphena and Tryphosa who also "labored in the Lord, together with Persis (Rom.16:12).

Can women serve in the following?

- Reading Scripture in worship
- Teaching Sunday school to adults
- Participate in new member interviews
- Advise the Session on decisions

Deacon Assistants

Faith has for the first time recognized the non-ordained leadership role of deacon assistants, including female members. Why open such a role?

1. It is Biblical

Romans 16:1-2 *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (deacon) of the church at Cenchreae, [2] that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help*

her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well."

The term "deacon" may refer to an official title or simply as a servant. It is noteworthy that Phoebe stands at the head of a long list of recognized church leaders in Rome in Romans 16. Whatever Phoebe is, she is not less than one leading in a diaconal ministry.

2. It is Historical

1st Century testimony of women in deacon roles:

- "Pliny mentions church diaconissae or ministrae in his 112 A.D. Epistle to Trajan
- "deaconesses as early as 100 A.D."8 The Apostolic Constitutions starts off the recommended prayer "concerning a Deaconess at the time of her appointment"

Early Church Fathers

- Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Apostolic Constitutions, and Chrysostom."
- In the congregation of Chrysostom in Constantinople around 400 A.D. there were at least 40 "deaconesses" about whom Chrysostom once noted, "they all seemed to possess ... patience, immutable resolution, freedom of speech and lofty boldness" and as such he proclaimed how the deaconesses "put to shame the enemies" of God" and "deliver a deadly wound to the devil" while also bringing comfort to "those that fight for the truth."

John Calvin

- Institutes (IV:13:19), while discussing I Tim. 5:9-15, Calvin stated that "Deaconesses were created...to discharge the public ministry of the Church towards the poor...."
- Institutes IV.3.9 in the section "on deacons" Calvin describes women appointed for the role of deaconess: "Of this sort were the widows whom Paul mentions to Timothy [1 Tim. 5:9-10]. Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor."

Presbyterian (1867) PCUS draft, IV-4-6

- *The New Testament authorizes the employment of godly women in the diaconal function. Wherefore it is proper, where it shall appear needful, that the church-session select and appoint deaconesses, for the care of the sick, of prisoners, of poor widows and orphans, and in general for the relief of distress.*

3. It has been a part of the PCA since 1973

- Current PCA Book of Church Order 9-7. *It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (BCO 17).*

"Slippery Slope" Fallacy (T. David Gordon)

Often, a slippery slope argument is "enhanced" by citing an example of someone who "slipped." It is then suggested that the view under consideration, while not wrong in itself, should be rejected because of what it might lead to. Of course, since we are sinners, we are capable of (and indeed it is a rather easy matter to multiply instances

of an individual abusing some truth. This abuse, however, does not make the truth dangerous in itself, or wrong. It is still a truth, to be embraced by everyone who loves truth.

The reason the slippery slope fallacy is so appealing to us is that there is an element of truth to it. Beliefs are logically connected to other beliefs, and it is true that embracing one error will, normally, produce other errors. However, truth does not inherently lead to error; God believes everything that is true, and not one of those truths leads Him into any error of any sort.

Can there be male deacon assistants?

There may be men who desire to serve and lead in diaconal ministry without being ordained. The reasons for this could vary from not being called to a perpetual office to doubts about qualifications.

Role of Deacon Assistants

a. Gifted Leaders: Deacon Assistants are those recognized as gifted leaders in the ministry of the “communion of the saints.” They are charged with leading teams and crafting policies under the authority and oversight of the deacons.

b. Wise and Involved Counsel: Deacon Assistants are heavily involved in the life of the church and are able to provide helpful, wise, and valued counsel to the deacons in every aspect of diaconal ministry.

What kind of authority do deacons exercise?

- Overseeing and making decisions regarding property
- Enacting policies for various one-anothering ministries (building use, nursery, equipment, worship administration, budget, mercy ministry)
- Entering into contracts for services on behalf of the church

What about Women Shepherding Women?

Titus 2:3–5

[3] Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, [4] and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, [5] to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

Here is another example of mature, gifted women assisting in leading.

How would Faith benefit from a Titus 2 group of women discipling women? What issues would they be equipped to aid our congregation?