

FRONTLINE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

SESSION 4: GENDER

OUTLINE OF SESSION 4

TEACHING: 30 MIN

A Biblical Vision of Gender
What does it Mean to Be a Man?
What does it Mean to Be a Woman?
Gender and Marriage
Being a Gender-Redeeming Church

EXERCISE: 15 MIN

Submission and Authority

TEACHING NOTES (30 MIN)

A BIBLICAL VISION OF GENDER

For 20 years, Frontline Church has been committed to being a Gender-Redeeming church. Gender-Redeeming isn't a priority for us because we want to jump on a bandwagon of cultural "hot takes." We believe our gender is an essential part of who we are as men and women. Gender is a gift from God to us, hard-wired into our humanity. It speaks loudly about who we are and what God made us for.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

As we explore the Bible's teaching on gender, we are standing on holy ground. As image-bearers, each one of us has been given immense value and worth. We believe that embracing and embodying God's good vision for gender leads to flourishing in the home, church, and world.

When Jesus taught about gender, he regularly pointed us back to the very beginning of the Bible, to Genesis 1 and 2. He affirmed a concept of gender that finds its very roots in creation. When we look at the creation of man and woman in the beginning, a few big ideas begin to emerge. There are four main ideas we want to highlight from the biblical vision of gender. Write these in the blanks as we go.

1. THE PURPOSE OF GENDER

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, he made humans as the pinnacle of his creation. Humanity was designed to be different from all other created things. They were to be the image of God. This means that, in the beginning, our purpose was to reflect who God is in all his beauty and glory. One of the ways that God intends for humans to reflect his glory is through our gender.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And 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." (Gen 1:27–28)

God did not create a generic, genderless human being. From the beginning God chose to make male and female in his image. Both male and female are important to God's vision of humanity.

2. THE UNITY OF GENDER

God's intention for humanity is for male and female to be united together, sharing their glory as image bearers of God. Godly unity is where the Bible chooses to start our story. When we forget the unity of man and woman, darkness and evil follow—evils like subjugation, manipulation, and misogyny. In reaction, we may embrace a polarized view of the sexes that only serves to reinforce the enmity between men and women. However, Scripture wants us to see men and women united together in dignity, humanity, equality, and shared mission.

3. THE DIFFERENCES OF GENDER

Man and woman are united in their glory as humans, but they both carry unique engendered glory as well. When we look at Genesis 1, Scripture highlights all the glorious unity of man and woman. When we look at Genesis 2, Scripture highlights the beautiful diversity of man and woman.

In Genesis 2, when Adam first catches a glimpse of Eve, he cries out in joy and delight, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...” In the woman, the man doesn't see an enemy. Nor does he see a copy of himself. Rather, he sees a beautiful image bearer of God—one who is like him but with beautiful differences. He sees someone he can wholeheartedly embrace without shame. In the beginning, human relationships were enriched by uniting what was different.

4. THE GIFT OF GENDER

It is good to be a man. It is good to be a woman. Our gender, male and female, is first and foremost a blessed reality. The good gift of God over male and female is a shared glory. Men and women are united in their humanity, and yet distinct in their gender. They fit together in their differences and fit together in their shared glory. In God's grand creation, men and women are equal in value and dignity but not interchangeable or the same. The differences are divinely ordered and glorious. God works through the different callings and designs of men and women to bring order, beauty, and truth into the world. He redeems and works out our shared calling through our beautiful differences. This is his gift to creation!

Reflection Question: Can you see any ways in which your understanding of gender is shaped more by the world or your past than by what God blesses in men and women?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?

The first man was created from the ground and was given this task: to cultivate and protect the beautiful garden God had created.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Gen 2:15)

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Write this down. **The man had a unique responsibility within the world to work and keep.** The man is charged to defend and cultivate the garden, working to see its good, godly order flourish on the earth. The man is given a holy calling to serve as a watchman over creation. He is designed to guard the garden, his wife, his future children, and the world they are building.

In other words, the man is given a fatherly calling over creation. This doesn't make men better than women, but it does give them a unique responsibility to initiate, lead, protect, and serve as those who will give an account to God. Masculinity is oriented toward self-sacrificial initiative that cultivates and guards a space where growth and flourishing are possible.

Jesus, as a man, fully embodied God's vision for masculinity. He was neither effeminate nor macho. He was tough, yet tender. As a carpenter, he was strong and worked with his hands. As a teacher, he was compassionate and gentle. He boldly confronted religious leaders with authority. And yet he took the place of a servant to wash his followers' feet.

Jesus' masculinity was rooted in who God made men to be. As our vision for masculinity comes in line with God's vision, we begin to see that Jesus himself is the perfect example of godly masculinity. Masculinity isn't something of which men need to repent. It is something men are charged to embrace, as they bring their masculinity under the authority of Jesus. As men stand firm in biblical masculinity like Jesus, it will bring blessing to those around them. This is why the Bible charges men to recapture the beautiful picture of godly masculinity.

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Cor 16:13-14)

Men, God has called you to take up your masculinity and lay down your lives for the good of those around you.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WOMAN?

Again, write this down. **The first woman was created as a helper for the man, to bring life and rest to a weary world.**

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."... The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. (Gen 2:18, 3:20)

The woman was made to be a helper "fit" or suitable for the man. In Scripture, a "helper" is not a personal assistant. A "helper" supplies strength and life where it is lacking. In the Old Testament, this word, ezer, is used dozens of times: only two times for women, with the vast majority of other uses referring to God himself. Rather than being degrading, this word demonstrates the unique calling of women. Women are

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biological, relational, and cultural life-givers. They bring a sense of peace and rest that makes us call out like Adam, “At last!” Adam is called to protect, but without Eve, there isn’t much worth protecting.

Women were made to image God’s life-giving and life-sustaining work in the world, and he wrote this reality into their very bodies. Women create, multiply, nurture, and transform. They bring forth life—yes, sometimes physically from their bodies—but, more broadly, with the whole of their lives. A woman’s ability to be “life-giving” is not limited to her childbearing years. By giving their lives away for the blessing and benefit of those around them, spiritual mothers point us to the heart of God, who first gave all of himself to offer us life.

Femininity is oriented towards life-giving receptivity that provides strength and rest to the weary world. Womanhood points us to the core of what it means to be human: we were made to give and receive love, to be entirely transformed by it, and to see that love bring forth new life. The Christian life is bound up in a love that multiplies and bears fruit. When rightly ordered under Christ’s authority, womanhood becomes a gift to the body of Christ and to the world.

GENDER AND MARRIAGE

Men and women are called to live all of their lives embracing and embodying the gift of their gender. As we obey God, walk in faith, and grow in maturity, we do all of those things as either a man or a woman. When we relate to God or each other, we do so as gendered beings. This is most clearly seen in the covenant of marriage, where man and woman are brought together as one.

Fill in the blank here. **Marriage points outside of itself as a picture of the union between Christ and the Church.** In light of the beautiful differences in our gender, there are distinct roles that a man and woman fulfill if they are called to marriage. God intends that a husband and wife love and serve one another as a picture of how Christ and the Church love and serve one another. Ephesians 5 explores the deeper meaning that is hard-wired into every marriage.

WIFE

Corresponding to the woman’s ability to give life and rest, a married woman is called to bring peace and strength to her husband, as well as joyfully submit to her husband’s leadership—just as the Church submits to Jesus. A wife is called to follow the Church’s example of inviting, receiving, and following the leadership of Jesus. In this submission, she is likewise following Christ’s example, who willingly and beautifully submitted to his Father, though equal to him in dignity, value, and worth. A wife is called to partner with her husband to see their family glorify God. She has both a unique voice as well as gifts that should be honored and cultivated in the marriage, under her husband’s leadership.

Since this submission flows from the image of God and illustrates Christ and the Church, it should never devalue, silence, or subjugate women. A wife is not called to follow her husband no matter what. A wife should never follow her husband into sin. Rather, she is intended to follow him as he follows Christ.

HUSBAND

Corresponding to the man's calling to work and keep, a married man is given the responsibility to love, protect, and lead his wife, just as Christ loves, protects, and leads the Church. A husband is called to follow Christ's example and lay down his own life for the good of his wife. The only way a husband can follow Christ's example is also by following the Church's example—submitting himself to Christ's leadership first. He should spend his life in service to his bride, putting her wellbeing and preferences above his own. He should create an environment where his wife can flourish in her calling as a woman.

A husband's leadership should never be oppressive or abusive in any way. He is never called to subjugate or dominate his wife, for that would dishonor Christ's example of servant leadership. Marital tyranny misrepresents the God who created marriage as a sign of his own love. Rather, a husband should relate to his wife as an image-bearer of God with dignity, value, and worth, who gives life and rules the family alongside him.

BEING A GENDER-REDEEMING CHURCH

If Frontline Church fully embraced being a gender-redeeming church, we would look and feel different from the world. Instead of perpetuating the "battle of the sexes", we would be ambitious to "outdo one another in showing honor." Men would take up the responsibility to protect and lead, so that those around them might grow into their own godly callings. Women would boldly step into their calling to give rest and life where it is lacking, providing blessing and wisdom that refines and beautifies their family and church.

Men and women are called to value each other as they serve and live in community together. This is why the church is called the family of God. Women and men in the church relate to one another as family.

Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father,
younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as
sisters, in all purity. (1 Tim 5:1)

When we have a healthy view of gender, we can begin to interact with one another first and foremost as brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. As we live in a gender-redeeming community, the glory of God will be displayed, and both men and women will flourish.

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So if the church is the family of God, how is it intended to function? **As the household of God, two offices of leadership have been ordained in the Church, namely elders and deacons.** A mature man or woman does not have to hold an office in a church to be a spiritual father or mother. In fact, each Christian is called to faithfully steward and lead in the life God has assigned to them. We are all meant to give our lives away in the family of God as brothers and sisters, and one day as wise fathers and mothers. The call to spiritual leadership is not unique to elders and deacons. But elders and deacons are called to spiritual leadership as a unique vocation.

1. ELDERS

Elders are biblically-qualified men who shepherd, lead, and protect the local church. In the Bible, the terms “pastor,” “bishop,” and “elder” all refer to the same role. These terms point to the various roles and responsibilities of an elder. The term “elder” relates to the man’s maturity as a spiritual father in the Church. The term “bishop” or “overseer” relates to the man’s governmental leadership, for which he will give an account (Heb 13:17). The term “pastor” relates to the man’s spiritual obligation to shepherd the flock of God entrusted into his care (1 Pet 5:2).

Each local church should be led by a team of elders who together carry the burden of ministry. A healthy eldership team prioritizes spiritual brotherhood by working together to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). They stand united in doctrine, values, philosophy, mission, and relationship.

In the Bible, every role in the church is open to women, with one exception: the office of elder. When the New Testament gives us specific qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, it tells us, among other character qualifications, that elders should be men. This is because the office of elder is a leading and protecting role. Elders are called by God to lead the church and protect the church from error and false teachers. They are spiritual fathers in the local church. This kind of role mirrors God’s design for masculinity in general. The “imaging” characteristics men display in fathering and husbanding are the same demanded of them in eldership. So in the New Testament, the office of elder is specifically limited to men.

Male eldership was not established by God because men are more capable or gifted than women, for that would deny the image of God in women. Rather, as we have seen, masculinity is uniquely designed for such a shepherding and protecting role. Some men are called to sacrificially step into the role of Elder for the benefit and protection of men, women, and children in the church.

2. DEACONS

Whereas elders lead the local church by oversight, prayer, and teaching, deacons lead in the church through care, service, and mission. Deacons are defined most simply as servant-leaders. They serve in various practical ways throughout the church to free up the elders to focus on oversight, prayer, and teaching. While every deacon

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is a servant of the church, not every servant of the church is a deacon. Rather, deacons are specific, recognized, established leaders within the church. As with the office of elder, the qualifications for deacons are laid down in 1 Timothy. As representatives of the church, deacons are publicly recognized and installed into this office. In serving the church, they contribute to the overall fruitfulness and health of the body.

While the office of elder is limited to men, both men and women are encouraged to serve as deacons. We see support for women deacons in both the Bible and throughout history. For instance, the qualifications for deacons laid out in 1 Timothy 3 include specific qualifications for women who serve as deacons (1 Tim 3:11). Unlike the office of elder, deacons do not have a teaching role, nor do they hold governing authority in the local church. Therefore, women and men serve alongside one another in this office.

EXERCISE: SUBMISSION AND AUTHORITY (15 MIN)

David Powlison reminds us that in various areas of life, we are all called to either submission or authority. “All of us are called to major on submission within some relationships and to major on initiating love within others.” In light of this dual reality, work through the following exercise with your table.

1. Identify Where You Lead and Follow. The following chart lists various Scriptures where God speaks about human authority in different areas of our lives.

- Take a few minutes to read through the list silently. Circle those Scriptures that specifically apply to you, in an area where you are either called to lead or follow. In some areas, you may be called to both lead and follow (e.g., you have parents, and you are a parent).

Sphere of Influence	Called to Lead	Called to Follow
Family	Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)	Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. (Eph 6:2-3)
Marriage	Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (Eph 5:25)	Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Eph 5:22)
Church	[Elders], shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Pet 5:2-3)	Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. (Heb 13:17)
Work	Masters, treat your [servants] justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Col 4:1)	Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Col 3:23-24)
Government	For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad... He is God's servant for your good... He is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Rom 13:3-4)	Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 Pet 2:13-14)

2. Discuss Together.

1. In what ways has God called you to lead others? How can you increasingly lead in a way that honors God's heart for those under your care?
2. In what ways had God called you to follow others? How can you grow in reflecting Christ to those placed over you?

3. Pray Together. Pray for one another to both lead and follow in ways that honor Jesus.