

Male and Female He Created Them

A Bible study on God's loving gift of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female

<p>Lesson #3A: Selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) partnering in the home</p>

Introduction

The author of this Bible study grew up in a congregation where women wore hats to church and men did not. He pastored a congregation where within the living memory of no small number of its members, men sat on one side of the sanctuary and women on the other. Now as the equivalent of a lay member of his congregation, he helped author a revision of bylaws that saw men and women beginning to partner together on four of its seven standing committees. Are such changes in practice clear signs that we have changed our confession of the biblical principle? Or are they evidence that, while the biblical principle is unchangeable, the applications that reflect that principle can change as they are impacted by shifts in culture and setting over the decades and centuries of the church's history.

Let's begin by stating what should be obvious to anyone who studies Scripture on this topic. God has given us a clear principle (the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female) that he has woven into our very creation, but he has refrained from giving us multiple specific applications of what this will look like.

If we don't recognize this in our homes and our churches, we easily end up exalting "the way things were done" in the homes and churches in which we were raised from the level of application (which may change) to the level of principle (which does not change). We end up saying more than Scripture says.

Or, the reverse happens. When we fail to carefully distinguish unchangeable principle from changeable application, we may carelessly jettison a particular application assuming we are wise and free so to do only to realize that the change sent an unintended message that clouded or distorted the biblical principle itself. We end up saying less than Scripture says.

That's why it remains forever important to grasp very clearly the principle from Genesis 1 and 2 that we've spent five lessons studying. It is always important to reaffirm in our minds the beauty of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female before we start with questions of application. If we do not, we can easily make (or reinforce) applications that call sin what is not sin or wink at what clearly is unwise or even sinful.

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to state the relationship of the principle and its application in our homes:

God's Word provides few specifics for exactly what the interdependent and complementary partnership will look like in each marriage. Providing a general principle with few specific applications leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways that make the most of the

unique gifts God gives to everyone in the household. It also leaves room for applications of the unchanging principle to look quite different from household to household, from culture to culture, and from age to age.

Where do we see God's wisdom in providing a clear principle but few specific applications?

As we seek to apply these Biblical principles, there is a part of us that wishes that God would just “make it easy for us” and “tell us what to do” in each situation, more like how he spelled everything out for his Old Testament people in the civil and ceremonial laws give through Moses.

What do the following passages teach us about how God has gifted and treats us differently and expects more of us in this New Testament age?

- **John 15:21** - “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”
- **Acts 2:17-18** – “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”
- **Galatians 3:23-25** - Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.
- **1 John 2:27** - As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

What challenge does this lay before us since God is dealing with us as his mature children in Christ?

In this lesson, we will look at a key application section of Scripture for our Christian homes. May God give us wisdom to recognize what makes for wise application of his principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female!

Part 1: The partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the home

➤ Read **Ephesians 5:22-6:4**

²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for 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.” ³² This 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.

^{6:1} Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

This is Scripture's most extensive treatment of selfless leading and selfless yielding as those unique callings partner in the home.

What does it say about the responsibility before God for the welfare of the home that God has given Christian husbands when we note that Paul speaks of the wife's calling of selfless yielding in three verses but it takes him eight verses to address husbands in regard to their calling to selfless leading?

What point is Paul especially wanting to help wives understand when he compares their yielding (submitting) in marriage to the church submitting to the selfless leading of Christ?

To what degree does the blessing we have just outlined remain true if a Christian wife has an unbelieving husband?

- Read **1 Peter 3:1-6** - Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which

is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Based on what we studied last time, what is the clear biblical exception to the "in everything" that Paul speaks in 5:24?

The heart of Paul's encouragement to Christian husbands can be found in 5:25 where he urges them to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Why would it be helpful to Christian husbands, as they consider what it means to love their wives as Christ loved the church, to ponder not only what we call Jesus' passive obedience (his willing death in our place) but also Jesus' active obedience (his perfect life offered in our place)?

How do verses 26 and 27 answer the husbandly objection that he would certainly sacrificially love his wife if only she were acting more loving herself?

What is the beautiful and ennobling honor God is paying to marriage as we consider this section of Scripture as a whole?

Remembering the beauty of the doctrine of vocation, what does it say to married Christians as they consider the importance of how they live out their callings as husband and wife?

How does it speak to the husband's unique calling to selfless leading to note that Paul speaks to fathers specifically when he talks about the spiritual nurture of children in the home (6:4)?

Why is a daily humbling and yet exalting grasp of our need for, and the beauty of, our forgiveness in Christ such a key element in the functioning of this interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in marriage and the home?

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to summarize the beauty of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the home:

- *The interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female finds its fullest expression in marriage. In a Christian home, male and female, as husband and wife, seek to live out what it means to be partners for their family's (Ephesians 5:22-33) and society's good. They do this as co-heirs of God's gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:1-7).*
- *God uniquely created the male, the husband, for the calling of selfless leading (head). The husband does this by loving and caring for his wife just as Christ loves and cares for the church (Ephesians 5:25-30). Selfless leading includes encouraging his wife to make the most of her God-given gifts (Proverbs 31:10-31) for the good of those influenced by their household.*
- *God uniquely created the female, the wife, for the calling of selfless yielding (helper). She submits to her husband and acknowledges his leadership in the same way that the church submits to Christ and acknowledges his leadership (Ephesians 5:22-24,33). This includes encouraging her husband to make the most of his God-given gifts for the good of those influenced by their household. Such self-yielding service does not include consenting to what is sinful since her Savior always remains her ultimate Head (Acts 5:29).*
- *While God designed the day-to-day spiritual nurture of all those in the household to be a shared task, it is the husband and father, as the one called to selfless leading, whom God holds primarily accountable for spiritual nurture (Ephesians 6:4).*

Where do these paragraphs help you understand the partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the home? What further questions do these words raise for you?