

Male and Female He Created Them

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

Lesson #3C: Selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) partnering in the Church

REVIEW: 1 Timothy 2:1-15

- The Scriptural principle of selfless leading and selfless yielding that applies in the home also applies in the church
- A specific application of what that looks like in practice is that God would have men take the lead in contexts of the authoritative teaching of the Word (e.g. public worship, preaching, mixed Bible study, etc.). However, this does not mean or imply that women must be altogether silent in such settings:
 - **Colossians 3:16** 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 with gratitude in your hearts to God.
- Individually any Christian as a member of the universal priesthood of all believers can share God's Word (law and gospel) and God-given insights with anyone (e.g. confronting a fellow believer about their sin, standing up for God's Word, evangelism, etc.)
- We have an example in Scripture of Aquila and Priscilla inviting Apollos, a learned Old Testament scholar, into their home and both of them teaching him God's Word more adequately (cf. Acts 18:24-26), yet the Holy Spirit chose not to sit us in on their discussions. It seems fair to say that both contributed to the maturation of Apollos' faith in Christ, yet did so in a way that honored this principle.

LESSON #3 Continued... Another Concrete/Specific Application of this Principle in Corinth

➤ Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-12

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. ³ 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. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. ⁶ If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. ⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. ¹¹ In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

In order to understand this section of Scripture, it is important to note that Paul is dealing with a custom (head coverings for females) that was at work not just within the congregation at Corinth but also within the culture of their city. For an adult female to appear in public in Corinth with her hair uncovered was to advertise that she was not under the leadership of any male.

One other thing is worth pondering as we begin to study this passage. It is very hard for us in this chapter, and in chapter 14 that we will study next, to recreate a detailed picture of what the various gatherings of the Christians of Corinth were like. Notice, for instance, that here in chapter 11 the women are praying and prophesying (remember: silence is not the principle, but only an application where God-given authority would be dishonored). However, in I Corinthians 14, Paul is going to make an application of absolute silence for them in that specific setting he addressed there.

Because of the house-church structure of much of early Christianity (many poorer Christians, few large gathering places where they could all easily come together), some have suggested that chapter 11 may have in mind the smaller and thus less formal gatherings of Christians in their homes for study and prayer (something more like a small group discussion or prayer group we might think of today). Then, they would suggest, chapter 14 has in mind those times when those smaller groupings of Christians in the city would all gather into one larger assembly (more as we would picture corporate worship on Sunday morning).

While the specific setting and situation in each chapter would have been perfectly clear to Paul's first readers, we must acknowledge that we struggle to know precisely how their gatherings were structured. And since the Corinthians had a rich measure of extra-ordinary spiritual gifts (like speaking direct revelation from God [prophecy] and speaking in languages they had never studied ["tongues"]), what worship was like for them is even harder for us to picture. Not to mention hard for them to manage themselves! The challenge of exercising all these special gifts of the Spirit without having their gatherings descend into disorderly chaos (using spiritual gifts as an excuse to ignore God's created order), must have been great, as Paul's words testify in both chapters.

While Paul is addressing his encouragement in particular to the women of the congregation, what may be the wisdom of beginning this section (verse 3) by saying that the head of every male is Christ, and also that, as the incarnate God/man, even Christ recognizes the headship of his heavenly Father?

Note: Paul does not write that the head of “every” woman is man or “every” man. What does this omission subtly communicate?

Why would Paul speak so strongly to the women of Corinth about observing this custom of head coverings when the custom itself was neither commanded nor forbidden by God in Scripture? What was this custom dimly reflecting, even in their pagan culture?

This is one of the most helpful sections of Scripture when it comes to understanding the difference between application (which may change depending on culture or setting) and unchanging principle (which remains unchanged).

Why is it today, while we still honor the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, that we do not urge females to wear head coverings at worship?

In verse 7, Paul is certainly not disagreeing with the reality that God gifted in creation (and in recreation in Christ) both male and female with his image. However, he is drawing attention to something that does mark us as unique as males and females.

In what special sense is the man—wherever he honors his calling to selfless leading—"the image and glory of God"?

In what special sense is the woman—wherever she honors her calling to selfless yielding—"the glory of man"?

Though we have already studied it, let's remind ourselves here how quickly after his statements about our complementarity (uniqueness, not duplication) as males and females in verses 4-10, Paul turns our attention back to our interdependence in verses 11 and 12. He is guarding the beauty of the biblical middle ground by saying two things as he stresses both the interdependent and complementary nature of the God-designed partnership of male and female. That's why, after urging us, "Don't act as if you are carelessly formed duplicates of each other!" he hastens to add, "but remember that God didn't fashion you as complements for you to live in loveless and arrogant independence from each other. Men and women—you are a carefully crafted partnership by God's design."

➤ **Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40**

²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹ For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder (similar to words used to describe the formlessness of earth at creation in Gen. 1:2) but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴ women should remain silent (σιγάω – “to say nothing” as opposed to 1 Timothy 2 - ἡσυχία - “quietness”) in the churches. They are not allowed to speak (λαλεῖν – the act of making audible sound), but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

³⁶ Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. ³⁹ Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Having already set the scene for both of these sections from 1 Corinthians above, here we need to note another unique feature of the Corinthian Christians' gathering that Paul is describing. The spiritual gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy (speaking by direct revelation from God) was regularly being exercised by multiple speakers in the gatherings Paul is referring to in this section. As Paul describes this setting, to stand up to speak would often have a powerful impact on the previous speaker. For example, if someone received a new revelation while another was speaking, as that person stood to speak that would silence the one currently speaking (verse 30). And, since someone could falsely be claiming to speak prophetically (by direct revelation from God) but then share something other than God's truth, there would also be those with the gift of discernment who would stand up to judge what that prophet had just shared (verse 29).

Imagine yourself in such a gathering of God's people in first century Corinth. How does that setting, as Paul describes it for us, help us understand why Paul speaks of silence (and the word he uses here is indeed a word for absolute silence) for the women in that setting?

Even as we wrestle to understand the unique setting of Corinthian worship, it is also vital to note that Paul does not ground the stated reason for his application in that unique situation of Corinth. At the close of verse 33, he states that he is making an application that was consistently made "in all the congregations of the saints" when it came to teaching the Word (application) with authority (the principle). Paul is thereby consistently making the same general application of the selfless leading with authority that he asks of the males in 1 Timothy 2. This guards the complementary side of God's good principle.

At the same time, we are wise to refrain from speaking with certainty that this setting in Corinth is equivalent to the modern-day voters' assembly. To claim that 1 Corinthians 14 commands that women must be silent in all such meetings of God's church is to claim to know far more about the setting in Corinth than we do. It also easily does violence to the interdependent side of God's good principle.

As we close our study of this section of Scripture, it is good for us to notice what Paul does in verse 36. There he reminds us that the Word of God didn't start with us, nor does it end with us. With that Paul lifts our sights beyond the narrow confines of our congregation's walls by calling us to see the much bigger picture of brothers and sisters in the Holy Christian Church. We especially think of the Christians who "walk together" (the meaning of the word "synod") with us in our church body and those who are in fellowship with us around the world in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

Why is seeing beyond our congregation's walls or our church body's boundaries such an important insight to keep in mind as we make decisions about how we will make applications of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female?

Also here there is a need to say two things. When other congregations adopt applications that are different from our own, what debt of love do we owe them?

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 our Christian congregations:

- *Just as within the home, so also within the gatherings of the body of Christ (the church), God designed male and female to use their God-given gifts guided by the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding so that in all things God's grace in Christ may be honored (1 Peter 4:10, 11; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 14:12).*
- *The unique callings of selfless leading and selfless yielding do not hinder but rather guide the use of the gifts of both male and female. The Scriptures provide abundant evidence of how God used the gifts of both without violating the interdependent and complementary partnership he has established (Romans 16:1-16).*
- *The encouraging and admonishing with the Word that all Christians are called to carry out as God's royal priests is a shared responsibility of both male and female (Colossians 3:15-17). Likewise, making the most of every opportunity in all their God-given callings to witness the truth to the troubled or unbelieving is a privilege of both male and female (1 Peter 3:15).*
- *When God's people gather for Bible study and worship, both male and female rightly participate in the singing of psalms and hymns, in the discussion of God's Word, and in adding their voices to the church's corporate prayers.*
- *When authority is being exercised in the church, God holds males responsible for exercising such selfless leading for the benefit of God's family (1 Timothy 2: 12).*

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

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Church Governance

Scripture does not give Christ's New Testament church any specific requirements for how a congregation organizes its governance. While there is a brief glimpse of the casting of lots (an Old Testament practice) used among the believers in Acts 1:26 as a replacement for Judas was selected, that certainly is not a divine mandate—or necessarily even a suggestion—that the casting of lots is a required part of congregational governance. Since in any form of church governance there will clearly be those called to exercise authority on behalf of the whole body of believers, we do well to ponder the implications of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in whatever way the church in its freedom determines for authority to be operating in its midst.

The most common form of government found in our congregations (by custom, but not by command of God) tends to vest final decision-making authority with the voters' assembly. While we do not believe that all voting is always an exercise of authority, where a vote is clearly exercising the authority to give direction to others they are to follow for their good or for the good of others, there God's people honor the calling God has given to the adult males of the congregation to exercise that authority on behalf of the family of faith.

However, while that application (remember: voting is not the principle) guards the complementary side of the principle, we often still have much to learn when it comes to honoring the equally important interdependent side of the principle. Congregations do well to work hard to make sure that the wisdom, insights, and concerns of all in the congregation are considered as decisions are made. That God intended both men and women to exert such godly influence in the process is the intent of—not a violation of—the interdependent and complementary partnership. Once again, Genesis 2:18 needs to resonate in our ears: "It is not good for the man to be alone."

Christian congregations are certainly free to search for other forms of church governance that may enable them—in their culture and setting—to best carry out the work of the gospel for the edification of the flock and outreach to those not yet in the flock. In fact, throughout the five centuries of Lutheran history, and even currently around the world, Lutheran congregations have been and are structured in many different ways in keeping with the customs and culture in which they were or are found.

However, no matter what form of church governance is chosen, honoring the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female will always play a key role. The God who moved all creation from "formless and empty" to well-ordered still delights today when his people imitate him as they delight in how he has so lovingly and beautifully ordered his world. This may in some cultures mark us as very different from the prevailing culture outside the church. At those times, we remember that embracing the cross as followers of the crucified (not functionaries of our culture) will never hurt us.

What is our organizational structure at Ascension? Our practice for voter's assemblies?

VOTERS (Final Authority) → Church Council → Subcommittees (headed/supervised by elder)

Open question/discussion prior to votes being cast.

How do these attempt to reflect the principles of which we've been studying? How can we do so better, more fully and beautifully, while confessing the principles we've discussed?